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The Popular Magazine

AUGUST TWENTIETH 1920

"The Empire of the Sage"
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FRANCIS HILL

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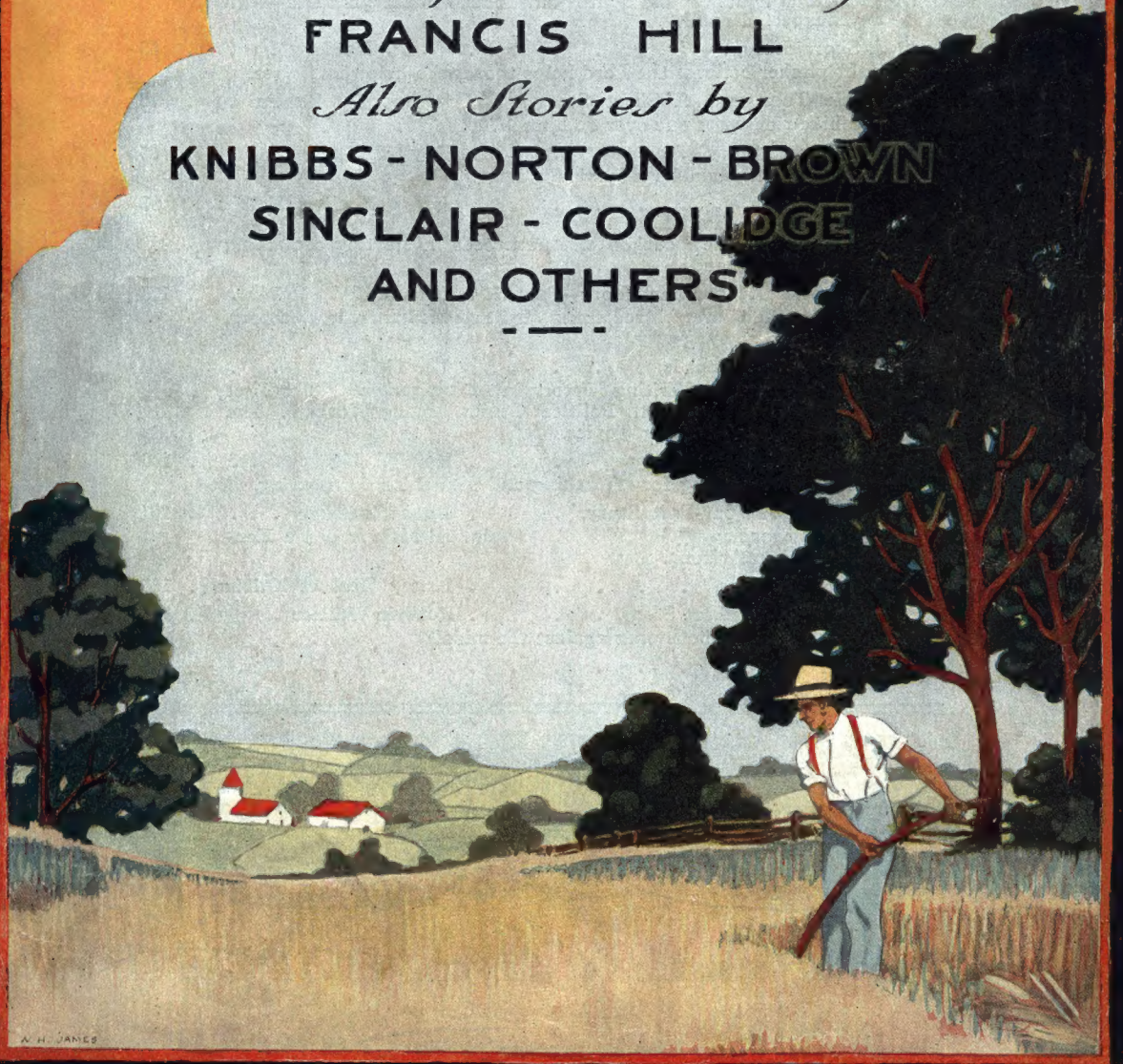

A. H. JAMES

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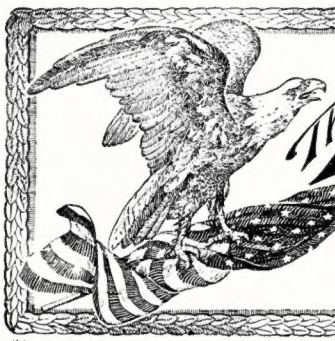

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The Popular Magazine

Vol. LVII. No. 3 — August 20, 1920

CONTENTS

The Empire of the Sage. A Complete Novel, . . **Francis Hill** 1
The Green Bow fights the old fight against sheep to the grim end—with an unexpected result.

Ivory. A Short Story, ... **W. R. Hoefer** . . . 65
A "bush" pitcher believes the Lord helps those who help themselves.

The Adelaide Thousand. A Short Story, . . **Raymond J. Brown** . . 75
A crack bike rider puts one over on himself.

The Dam. A Short Story, ... **Roy Norton** 85
David and Goliath shoulder a lady's burden.

Pay Dirt and Tailings, ... **Henry Herbert Knibbs** . 93
A Two-Part Story—Part I.
Old Jim Houston's new cuckoo clock succeeds in starting something more than its hands.

Poor Man's Rock. A Four-Part Story—Part II., . **Bertrand W. Sinclair** . . 105
MacRae feels the Gower hatred, finds a fight on his hands, loses a boat, and finds some sympathy.

Caught in the Net. Editorials, ... **The Editor** 121
Lend to the Farmers. Writing History in Advertisements. The First Hundred Comes Hardest. Political Genius Among Workers. The Farm Beckons. Popular Topics.

Try, Try Again. A Short Story, ... **Roy W. Hinds** . . . 126
A detective gets nothing for something and something for nothing.

Maverick Basin. A Four-Part Story, ... **Dane Coolidge** . . . 131
Mrs. Zoolah overplays her hand, and Allifair and McIvor end a Kentucky feud in Arizona.

Punchin' Dough. Verse, ... **Henry Herbert Knibbs** . 145

An Ebony Finish.. A Short Story, ... **Rothvin Wallace** . . . 146
Mr. Pinkwiddy plays both ends against the middle.

A Chat with You, ... 159

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

Vol. LVII. AUGUST 20, 1920. No. 3

The Empire of the Sage

By Francis Hill

Author of "Once on the Summer Range," Etc.

The wars of the sheepmen and cattlemen have resulted in many stories in magazines and books, but none of them have we liked quite so well as this. The epic nature of those struggles is felt by the writer, and he describes vividly, from an intimate knowledge of his subject, yet with the impersonal manner of the true artist. Both sides are here given, and the author makes you feel the logic of events in one of the most important movements in American history.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

THAT afternoon, a gusty November day of 1880, Lige Riggs loped furiously back from town, along the winding valley road, sixteen miles, to his own ranch stables.

"Town" was Burnt Robe, county seat of a Montana area about the size of one of the larger New England States. Breed County, this would be, on the empty territorial maps. Also the valley of Riggs' hard riding had its typical name. Agate Valley, the sweet, fine Agate River Valley of central Montana. Not even the ranch toward which the man rode, indeed, lacked for characteristic and romantic title. His partner, Alec Hailton, had seen to that. He had christened the ranch Green Bow. It had been their home for the past five years.

Riggs loped sharp up to the storm lobby of his main log horse stable, dismounted, and frowningly unsaddled. He was a short person, grizzled, shaggy. For twenty years of his life he had been a watchmaker. Except for the near-sighted eyes and the big, silver-rimmed spectacles, and perhaps his hands, nobody would now suspect it. Along with his unkemptness, a primal open-air quality had grown in him. This chill November afternoon he was full of surly threat.

He went about his uncinching in the storm lobby with automatic care, but his mind was miles away. The hairy weatherbeaten face, overlaid with tan and stiffened under rigors of exposure till it should by all rights have been expressionless, alternately whitened and mottled in the throes of a tearing, bitten-back rage. Once or twice he so far forgot himself as to mutter aloud, baring clamped and tobacco-stained teeth. That was a bad sign—nerves.

Saddle and bridle and hackamore stripped off, he had just clapped his gray on the nigh flank, to drive him on ahead into the stable, when Alec Hailton abruptly limped round the upper corner of the lobby. Riggs' dappled pony, heaving and distressed, but not by any means done, disappeared at a trot inside the dark of the stable. The two men, left alone in the storm lobby together, gravely nodded, confronting each other across the loose reddish sprawl of Lige's flung-down saddle.

"Well, Alec," said Elijah Riggs. He dropped the boding stare. "I got a piece of news for you, all proper."

The other with the scarred nose and cheek eyed him attentively. And then "Cut loose, brother. I guess I'm always waiting for news."

"Anybody but us would have jumped to it. They'd have savvied, Alec. It's dead plain, dead open and shut."

"Well?" demanded Hailton.

"Sheep."

Riggs pronounced the word without emphasis, almost casually, in a choked voice, squinting fixedly the while at the bridle and hackamore yet idly swinging in his hand.

"Sheep?" Hailton echoed.

"Sheep."

The elder partner and dominating figure in the Green Bow management was a six-foot man, rather finely drawn, perhaps overmuch. Nothing of Riggs' shagginess, nothing of tobacco stains, attached to him.

Nevertheless, he resembled the little watchmaker in one significant detail. His early life, too, had been sedentary. But, as with Riggs again, later years on the ranch had sufficiently bronzed and expanded him, toughening his soft muscles into wires. Five years of combat, of stark physical struggle with hoof and horn; tireless, unremitting, inflexible. And now—the solid frontier shape. So had the valley ranch dealt with Alexander Hailton. Only, he was not at all a conspicuously good or successful ranchman.

He looked out at the world, over his high broken nose, through large and quiet brown eyes; reflective, for the most part, with tiny raying glints of skepticism in it. Agate Valley events had tried these two, one way and another, pretty desperately, with the single noticeable effect of whipping them always the more firmly abreast.

"Sheep?" repeated Hailton. He shook his stooping, lean head. "No, it couldn't be that, Lige."

"Why couldn't it be that?"

"Because they must know this valley wouldn't stand it. They must know *we* wouldn't stand it—Green Bow—you and I."

Then at last Elijah Riggs did explode, with chained ferocity, with trembling violence. "Man, man! I tell you, it's *so!* The town's full of it. Oh, damn their thieving souls! Can't you *understand,* Alec? They're showing their hand, they've thrown down the cards. Why, some of the blasted sheep are here. *Here,* man! And thousands and thousands more coming—being driven up from the South—Texas. Wait till spring! Or no need to wait. The whole game's out. They don't pretend to cover it up a minute longer. Sheep! God, won't you understand what I'm telling you, Alec? *Sheep!*"

Slow and somber, Hailton continued to shake the clean-modeled thinker's head. "I simply can't credit it, Lige. Not that. There must be some mistake along the line somewhere."

"No," Hailton deliberately went on. "I just can't believe, brother, in any sheep story. It's bluff, Lige. Not that Leo Staten isn't ready and willing to go most lengths. He is. He's proved he is. But this—this would be *too* much, Lige. *Too* far. Wouldn't it, now? Staten's no fool. He can't have misjudged us as crazily as they think."

"All right," muttered Riggs. "You'll see."

"No, we've got to hold on to ourselves, Lige. We have, really. We can't afford to lose our humanity, our sense of common reason. I smell danger of that. Staten's a czar, I grant you—a dirty, hoggish czar. But—there are limits, Lige. Even a medieval tyrant had now and then to shy off from certain odds."

"Well," growled Riggs, chewing at his grizzled, square beard, "maybe I don't savvy your czars and history-book tyrants very strong. But I savvy Staten. And I savvy *sheep.*" He clenched and unclenched his small, still curiously sensitive watchmaker's hands several times. "And that's a-plenty for me. That's a whole staving lot!"

The November sun was setting over the faraway, bald mountains in a windy, blood-and-gold sky. Neither of the Green Bow partners glanced up. Silent and absorbed, they stood a moment longer in the saddle-littered storm lobby. Then Riggs followed his pony into the shadowy depths of the low log stable. Hailton, with slight staccato limp, moved off toward the ranch house, whence a loud Swedish call had just come. Supper!

CHAPTER II.

Beauty and good grass, in a dry country, need not necessarily go together. But the Green Bow in Agate Valley had them both. Any devil-may-care puncher who had ever ridden these ranges would have told you—here was the crack ranch site of the county. The name, Green Bow, came from a huge crescent of vivid, natural meadow which reached furlongs up and down on the west side of the creek.

At the lower end of the crescent, a number of icy-cold springs welled flush out of the

oasis of rank and wiry wild grass; forming, with some other water that seeped down from a dam above the house corrals, a kind of shallow slough, where muskrats whistled in the summer dawns, where mallards lighted, and killdeer and curlews incessantly wheeled and cried. Water, indeed, had been spread over Green Bow with a lavish hand. Too much water, and not too little, was the source of all its ills.

The east bank of the creek rose generally as a yellowish clay bluff, gravelly in spots, averaging a height of from eight to ten feet.

Beyond that, across the wide belt of valley bottom, irregular and involved, lay only the omnipresence of the pale and bushy gray sage. Growing to the very edges of the crumbling creek bluff, it looped and undulated and stretched away—this ragged carpet of sage; pungent, lusterless; into the clear and rarefied blue void of sunny distance; into the dreaming and mysterious nothingness of illimitable north and south.

Farther to the eastward of the creek, directly across from Green Bow ranch house, three diminutive scoria hills broke down from a wooded butte and dwindled off toward the flat range. In the largest and steepest of the hollows between these ancient lava ridges, tapering and bare, another tiny handbreadth of water trickled, with a thin line of cottonwoods, willows, and quaking asps wavering along it.

Then, at a point, unexpectedly, that thin line of trees broadened out, luxuriated into a real clump, not so much a thicket as a grove. But, in fact, yes—even trees—a veritable dry-country wisp of park!

Mostly they were the dark and glossy poplar trees, single spaced, austerely, aloof, with only a few odd crowded willows thrown in for relief. Cottonwoods and aspens, frail stragglers along the edges of the desert, assembling themselves into a sober and shivering little islet of shaded park. And here it was, in the midst of the slim trunks and the never-muted flutter of talking leaves, that Jinny Hailton had her wikiup.

November was the month of Lige Riggs' loping from Burnt Robe, with the sinister news for his partner's ear. Since then, the long northern winter has slipped by—snow and wind and flinty cold. Again the eternal dormant grass had waked. Six winter moons—and so, on a morning of late May, in 1881, Jinny Hailton was out there alone at her singular wikiup in the draw, hard at work on what she was pleased to call her "spring house cleaning."

In essentials, her wikiup was no more than a skeleton pole tepee, circular at the bottom, running to a bristling crisscross, well lashed together, at the top. It made a frame that could quickly be covered over with robes or bark, and turned into a quite adequate Indian shelter. Only, robes and bark and adequate Indian shelter was never Jinny Hailton's idea of spring house cleaning. Instead, she had during the past two days densely overhung the rude conical skeleton of poles with a soft mat of greenery; fresh-cut and spicy armloads of it; a fanciful, poetic blanket of closely interwoven flowers and grasses and twigs of the new-leaved trees.

About her bower, on every side, Jinny had raked and swept the ground clear, and had laid out a small, round courtyard, marked off by stones, neatly placed and smooth.

To "Drift" Weir, this May morning, quietly pushing his horse in through the outlying sentinels of pale-stemmed trees, not one jot or tittle of any of the beauty, confusing and faylike, was lost. Drift was not the casual range-riding cowboy. On the contrary, he ranged as perhaps outstanding horse foreman of all Breed County, besides still being, when he chose, an active bronchobuster of a particular stripe of finesse and wily daring. He was nearly the size and heft of an average Montana horse himself, for a matter of fact. But also he had the silky method. Bronchobusting as a routine occupation, though, would date half a decade or so back in the man's life. He had at the present graduated well beyond that. To be at once twenty-nine and ranch boss of the bred-up Candlestick undeniably implied certain qualities.

Automatically he checked his horse. He had ridden silently, at a walk; and Jinny, engrossed in the finishing up of her work, and with a ripple of "Drink-to-me-only" on her faintly parted lips, did not either see or hear him. Then her pony Trix, tied to an adjoining tree, nickered companionably to Mr. Weir's Jonah. Drift pulled off his big dove-colored hat on the way and let it swing in his hand.

Unusually clean-shaved, unusually dandified in all his elaborate trade equipment, he wore to-day a full gray flannel shirt and black silk handkerchief, both manifestly spick and span from the tub and irons of a Chinese. On his hands, the gauntleted buck-

skin gloves were long, of coach-driver's class, Indian tanned, and flexible as kid; and his chaps glistened in the sun with the wavy-dyed hair of the Angora goat. High heels, gun, belt, dragging spurs. The total ran into a figure, flash and barbaric, but handsome. Drift's face atop was nice, rather chiseled, rather classic. On his upper lip, divided by the pleasant medial cleft, lay a mustache, firm and blond, coarse in texture, but tended to a hair.

Sitting on the ground inside her tepee inclosure, Jinny broke sharp off from raking and scraping, and smiled.

"Oho!" he exclaimed. "So here you are, all good and plenty, ain't you?"

"Oho! Yes, so here I am, all good and plenty, ain't I?"

"And there," continued Drift, "there *I* was, plumb by my lone, a-stringing along up behind the Split Buttes."

She shrugged. "No? By his little lone. How thrilling!"

"Which I just all of a shot wakes up and says to myself, I says: 'Hombre,' I says, 'it's only about ten miles out of your line over to the Agate.'"

"Well!" murmured Jinny pensively. She had her hands clasped about her knees, balanced; was lissomely rocking to and fro on the ground. "Well! Ride a poor horse ten extra miles—a great whopping hoodlum like that—just to give him a passing drink of water."

"Sure. 'And then,' I says, still going on foolish to myself, you savvy, 'then, while Jonah's gratefully digesting of that cold Agate water, I'll maybe climb off and take a little scout around for young Jinny.'"

She was eighteen years old, lonely, and since short dresses absolutely untaught by women. Yet—the crafts of Omphale and Delilah were evidently not unknown to her. She said "You! I'm glad you bothered to hunt me."

"Shucks!" disclaimed Drift. "It ain't hunting you none to come to the wikiup of a spring morning. It's a dead safe bet, that there is."

"Oh, *is* it, Mr. Giddy Blond Horse Hustler?"

He nodded. "You're as certain-sure to be here—as the blessed birds!"

"Well, maybe it won't be so always, Drift. Maybe this will be my last year."

"Listen!" he demanded. "What's the latest from that blasted Staten outfit? I hear he's starting about a million more sheep up."

"The latest for *us*," returned Jinny bitterly, "is that he's just thrown in a big crew of men and is fencing off Two-Sleep Cañon."

"No?" muttered the horseman, astounded.

"I've told you."

"Say! The nerve of that crooked old short-deck skunk."

"Don't let's talk about it!" cried Jinny passionately. "Not this morning. I want to be able to forget all that for a couple of hours." She faced round to the wikiup. "Isn't my doll's house pretty?"

The giant range rider drew a long breath. "You sure bet you, missy, it is!" His rather light tenor voice, so ordinarily humorous and even, grew throaty on him, sheerly trembled. "Pretty? It's the prettiest thing I know in the world anywhere—that little shack. And it means more to me."

"I believe this gorgeous blue morning has got into your thick blood—that's what I believe. *Isn't* it lovely everywhere? I wanted to bring my blankets out here last night and sleep."

"Holy suffering!" He queried her anxiously. "You didn't, though, Jinny?"

"Daddy and uncle Lige wouldn't let me."

"I should slightly whistle *not*.. Hey! Sleep? And the wool people filling this country chuck up that a way with the scum of the earth for their herders!"

"Yes. You're as bad as daddy and uncle Lige. Daddy even wants to send me back home to Pennsylvania. But I'll never do that!"

Perplexedly the strapping Candlestick man took off his gloves. "But I don't know, Jinny. Maybe you'd ought to do as Alec wants—trail along back to your safe folks away off yonder in Pennsylvania. There's sure going to be war here. There sure is. Maybe you'd ought to move in as far as town, anyway."

His slapping of his leg with the quirt had attracted the sitting girl's attention to his feet. "What!" she sang out. "Another new pair of silver-inlaid spurs?" And then she caustically added: "Well, I *am* going to move in as far as town, Mr. Dude Card Sharp, if you care to know it."

"Are you, though, Jinny? When?"

"This afternoon."

"For good?"

"For the evening. Didn't you hear there's a mask on at the town hall to-night?"

"Jinny! You ain't?"

"How many times do I have to tell you a thing? Dress up, dance, and be merry! For to-morrow—you remember the rest. And with this awful sheep fight ready to break out just any minute—can't you come?"

Large and white, the hands of the dandified Candlestick man churned the air. "Who? *Me?* Great Lord Almighty!"

"Now, then, rowdy. Don't *dare* curse! Why can't you?"

"Why?" Drift smote at the rippled gray-flannel bulge of his chest helplessly. "*'Why?'* she says! And the hoss round-up a-chasing out at three o'clock to-morrow morning! And me being boss for our two outfits—nine men—ours and Duncan's! *Why?* Holy ki-yooting St. Peter! Ain't that some reason, Jinny? Listen! The old man at the ranch would just lay right down on me and die—wouldn't he?"

"Oh, in that case, of course, you mustn't do anything rash."

"Jinny, you ain't been and gone and give away the first dance to anybody?"

"Mercy's sake!" It was now her turn to gasp. "You do hit the high places, Drift Weir, don't you? First dance? Why, I haven't so much as got a costume for myself yet. I don't even know for positive I'm going."

"Didn't you, one minute ago, without batting an eye, tell me you was?"

"Oh, that was only to make you jealous, you big, blond gawk. I didn't think you could come. And you oughtn't to, either. If I give you my first dance, will you see to it I get the prize for lady's costume?"

"You bet you I will!" Drift responded vigorously.

"Cross your heart?"

He crossed it. "Either that or I'll stampede the costume committee a whole lot," he promised.

She measured him from tip to toe, as her frank and imperious custom was, disregarding his outbreak and steadying him with a thoroughly sedate gaze. "I'm not truly finding fault with your vanity, I guess. No, nor with your being such a crazy spendthrift, either. You can't help yourself. It's how you're made." She flashed an approving corner of her eye on Trix. "Giving me the best jumping pony in the valley, and so on." Then she paused, weightily. "But the gambling, my friend——"

"You nod your head once. I'd chop my hand off before I'd pick up another card."

"I want to see you do it for yourself."

"Hey, what's the blasted use?" he repeated huskily. "I know I ain't the right sort of stuff for you. I savvy that, plain as day. You come of better stock than I do."

"Bosh, Drift!"

"Higher-grade stock. Why, even away out here on the range—look how your daddy has tended to you! Made you do exercises and study books, fixed you up with a gilt-edge schooling."

"Not a real education, as if I'd gone to a regular girls' school, as my mother did."

"Why not? Don't you reckon we size your dad up out here? He's a college graduate, ain't he? Wasn't he editor of a paper back there in the States?"

"Only a little country paper. It's he who says I'm not educated."

"Listen. I've been about some, missy. I know old-maid outfits and nuns keep schools for girls. Maybe you ain't picked up much of their sort of teaching out here. Still, don't you sneeze at what your daddy's done for you, though. It ain't just your prettiness that gets us. You're cleaner strain—cleaner and finer strain—than—than a thousand of the likes of me——" The competent blond giant tightened all over convulsively, then reacted, gave up every semblance of manhood. "But—Jinny—there's nobody else in sight yet, Jinny—is there?"

They were both of them mortally ashamed of him. Downcast-eyed, the girl slowly shook her head.

"Well," he ripped out, "thank all the holy stars for that!"

CHAPTER III.

Drift lost no time in pushing for the Green Bow ranch house. Hailton and Riggs, with one of the boys of their regular winter outfit, "Wagon-wheel" Sims, were at work on a bunch of newly rounded-up beef steers in the main corral. Drift found them there, and quickly satisfied himself as to the town ball for the night.

Then Drift took to the north road, on that easy-jiggling fox trot with which Jonah could cover such an astonishing amount of ground in the day's punch. The Candlestick man's job was only to make it up to Dun-

can's ranch, and then back home again behind the buttes to the Brightwater, by late afternoon. A sixty-five-mile jaunt, perhaps, all told.

Drift had first seen the light on a plantation up the Red River—the Lent of 1852 would be the exact date—and it was a plantation on which horses had always enjoyed, as of divine right, the foremost place. John Henry Weir, Drift's father, did not own the great many-slaved plantation. He was an English trainer who had come to Kentucky as a boy with a stable of imported thoroughbreds; remaining in this country, and marrying a Louisville girl out of the shop where he bought his innumerable pairs of fine gloves, and advancing so rapidly in his race-track career that, at twenty-six, he was already chief trainer on the elaborate Red River breeding estate. The birth of his one son befell in those halcyon days.

A good many things had happened to Drift since his father's early death, and he had lived here and there. But the lodging had never been out of close reach of horses. Montana cayuses were the concern now; and these could scarce be deemed the same stuff as the tall thoroughbreds which his father had trained and conditioned on the Red River and in the soft blue grass of Kentucky. Still, they had their points—cayuses. To one who prided himself on having tried all sorts.

Most sorts of men, too, Drift had tried, in his comparatively short and checkered progress through the open-air world; and, perhaps, not a few women. His was the romantic stripe. However that, of course, would have nothing at all to do with his considerable equipment of solid and experienced trade sense.

Drift grasped perfectly that he had no business jockeying about for a shot in at the brute of a ball to-night. He grasped that he had very much *less* than no business. But, as the devil would play it, Jinny Hailton was going in to that dance. Which simply meant him, the undersigned, George Decker Weir, hardship or no hardship, old man Crossett or no old man Crossett. O Lord! Drift groaned twice in tired succession, yawned, whistled, struck his bent, shaggy leg. He did wish Jinny hadn't been going. Jinny *was* going, wasn't she? Well, then, blast him—so was he!

There *were* other girls scattered about over the face of the globe, he reckoned. Rafts. And girls not so absolutely bat blind to his own special assortment of charms, neither! That hungry-eyed young biscuit shooter who had followed him into the back room of Crab Madigan's saloon the last time he was across to the Falls, on a poker whirl. When was it?—plenty recent—only a couple of weeks ago.

Nobody could possibly have mistaken that Falls girl, Maisie. He didn't want to go spraddling round, swelling up his chest. But she—that Dawse Hains Maisie girl—well, she was in love with him. And her love went for something with her, too, all right. Bad as she probably was. Yes, if he had so much as lifted the ghost of an eyelash, she'd have fought a path to him through fire and water, that girl. Got herself killed by Dawse—cheerful, unhesitating. No question, she straight *would!*

Supposing he just flatly had to have a woman to take care of him? Supposing the case had actually come to the pass of that? Well. There was his mother, wasn't there? And his sister Bess. As if they wouldn't be only too willing to pack up and traipse all these long miles out here to Montana, at a whisper of his need for them! Did he have to be told now of his mother and Bess? You bet you—not! One slanting hint of a word, and they'd *jump* for him. And Bess could every bit as easy get a school to teach out here as she could back in Missouri.

Crossett's splendid ranch, with the dimensions of a little European principality, sprawled across the lower valley of the Brightwater; a region noted peculiarly, almost exclusively, for the glory of its horses. One of the first of the big stock acreages roundabout, the Candlestick, was within nice junketing distance of town; not more than eight miles away, that is, nearest point to nearest point. The ranch had excellent buildings and improvements, looked in itself like a tolerable-sized frontier settlement, represented the outlay of a lot of money. But also had Jared Crossett, sole and seventy-year-old proprietor of the place, by now taken a middling quantity of the money back.

He was a merciless Yankee driver of a man, this leathery white-beard Crossett. Nobody ever especially thought of him as a beaming Santa Claus. Still, he had good horses, paid good wages, was at least as generally respected as cursed.

"I reckon," Drift carelessly mentioned to him, as they stood by a corral gate together after early supper, "I reckon I'll maybe ride in to the dance for a spell to-night."

"I reckon you maybe won't!" snapped the old man, quick as the bite of a steel trap.

Drift answered nothing. Crossett did not seem to take any unique pleasure or comfort in that. Storming, he began to pound the corral gate.

"Dance, dance?" he shrilled. "Name of God! Where *is* any dance? Not to-night, there ain't no dance!"

"In at the town hall," politely supplied Drift.

Old man Crossett raised and shook a trembling fist. "Jackasses! Drunks! Loafers! Crooks! Nobody from *this* ranch shall go in to it!"

"I'm going," murmured Drift.

On tiptoe, the Candlestick owner peered into his boss' serious and noncommittal face. For a full dragging minute, their two pairs of eyes—the elderly narrowed puckered and the independent narrowed young—met and held. Then, turning, Drift strolled steadfastly away toward his separate foreman's cabin. Shrunken and emaciated, quite speechless, Jared Crossett stooped and leaned and glared after him.

Drift was artistically qualified for a mask. That is to say, he happened to have on hand a rather nifty and smashing clown suit which he had last winter sent back to Chicago for. It was not gaudy at all, this costume; just a modest black-and-white-and-red affair. Yet, there was about the ridiculous circus lines a certain distinctive and voluminous cut, a tailoring, a broad effect of skill in conceit and management. Trifles like these could stir Drift with emotion. His unheroic cowboy essence was attuned to them. When he slid out onto the fairway of a dance floor in such paint and feathers, he felt, he had no need to blush for himself.

Emerging from the shack, neatly enveloped regalia under arm, he had the bad luck to ram plump into his peevish employer again. It was the crisis. Some punchers, squatting outside the common bunk house, licked their lips with happy expectancy. Drift volunteered nothing. The gaunt old man, false teeth clicking, nostrils dilated, wheeled and called out after him.

"Where you going?"

"In to town."

"You listen to me!" Drift bore impersonally on toward the stables. "Hey, you! Gosh-dang your ornery whelp's soul! Are you a-setting up to defy me? Are you, hey—right in the bosom of my own consarned ranch?" No answer. "Didn't I say once that nobody off this place could go in to town to any dratted ball to-night?"

The blond giant of a foreman had to halt. "Well, I'm sure sorry that's how you stand on her, Mr. Crossett. I reckon, all the same, I got to go."

"You do never have to go!" Old man Crossett was waving his skinny arms like ancient and distracted flails. "*Why* do you have to go?—you tell me that!"

"I'll be back in plenty of time. Your work won't suffer a frog's hair, you can gamble, on my account."

"I say you don't go!" screamed the flapping patriarch. "You hear me, you? I say you don't go!"

The boys from the bunk house gathered round him, for he shook as with palsy, seemed on the edge of falling. Drift, festive masquerade roll clamped under arm, pushed silently ahead and disappeared inside the stables. Fortunately, this Kelly horse he had up to ride to-night—his crack cutting pony—belonged to him; was his own individual property, like Jonah. When he had saddled, he struck along out by the main house for the gate.

"You—you—call yourself a foreman!" frothed the white beard. "Think I'm a helpless daffy old codger, hey? Think I can't do nothing? I'll teach you, drat your ornery no-account fly-by-night of a soul! Get! Get, you! Do you hear? Out! And don't ever dast show your ugly blackguard face back on this ranch again—see? What? I'll teach you. Climb, now! Quick!"

The words, shrill and jerking, leaped from his twitched-up pit of mouth in a searing torrent. "And never you bother about waiting for no trunk, neither! Name of God! *Trunk*, mind you—for a range hoodlum's few dirty rags of town-gadding traps! *Trunk*, hey? You just *try* to carry off any trunk! By Hades, I'll teach you! Hark 'ee. I'll pitch your gingerbread coffin of a trunk out onto the road with my own hands—you hear me, you?—with my own hard-working hands! Gosh-dang my all-fired buttons if I don't! Helpless daffy old codger, am I? One foot in the grave, have I? Can't start away on no round-up without you, hey?" He clawed convulsively at the stringy

and weatherbeaten parchment of his throat. "Get, you big ornery pig-headed whelp of a ruffian, you—get—get!"

Soberly Drift loped Kelly on over the familiar townward miles. Dark—the sweet returned miracle of spring dark, restless and cool—was winging down upon the dim road in front of him fast. At a point midway in to Burnt Robe, the boy's casual ear caught an incessant bleating of sheep far out on the lower verges of the valley. The sound undulated across the sage to him a good deal tempered and diffused by the distance, but it did not fail to arrest his attention.

"Another big Staten band being worked in from the south," the ex-Candlestick foreman muttered absently to himself. And then —"Holy Lord Almighty! She's sure coming, all right."

CHAPTER IV.

A strange but not necessarily sinister voice —tingled in Jinny's ears. "Hel-lo!" it said. And, as she looked up, "Beg pardon."

The Green Bow girl jumped galvanically to her feet, tossing back her profuse loosened hair, cupping her flushed face in stiff and cramped hands. She had been half asleep. "Why—why——" she gasped dazedly. The voice had come from a man, a boy, dressed in mixed Eastern and Western riding clothes. He was on foot, and stood in about the exact spot where Drift had so lately stood, immediately beyond the stones of the wikiup yard.

"I—I didn't hear—anything——" Jinny shook out, still stammering.

The intruder smiled. Was it a smile the least bit patronizing? Or only of amused composure? "Well," he suggested, "perhaps that's not so very odd."

The eyes of the incongruously dressed young interloper kept roving from her to her bower and back, exploring, manifestly still astonished, manifestly more than content with what he saw. "I'm afraid I wasn't on the road. I'm afraid I'm lost. Not stolen, you understand. Strayed."

Jinny let herself take him in fully, consideringly. He was inches shorter than Drift, and perhaps thirty pounds lighter in weight; trig and slim and well-tailored; dark of skin and eye, with a smart little black mustache. Also was he probably four or five years younger than her strapping cowboy friend. Only in one item, indeed, did he resemble Drift. But this was notable. He kept his head uncovered while he talked to her. Instead of a Stetson, though, it was a soft gray cap with a peak that he crumpled politely in his hand; and he had on a white shirt and tie and collar, and his gray sack coat was buttoned snugly about him. Where Drift seemed all barbaric jangle and looseness, the lithe lines of this boy's upper body were skillfully disclosed. Not from the waist down, however. Over his trousers—no doubt they were Eastern riding breeches, which would never in the world do out here—on his legs were big, new, laced leather chaps, just off some store counter, bright yellowish-red in color, entirely Western. There was a tang here. It made a curious foreign twist of range equipment, interesting.

"Not, you know, that I *mind* being lost at all," the dark young man was hastening to add. "Not under such conditions. Hardly likely. This is a simple little miracle of a place."

His face undeniably impressed her. It was melancholy, refined, at once dreamy and cynical. It even reminded her a wee trifle of her father. She accepted the boy out of hand as the student type; aloof and pretty pessimistic; maybe morbid, maybe selfish and sensual. At any rate, notwithstanding his new chaps, he was truly, as far as possible, removed from the everyday snapshot Western. This person no more natively belonged in Agate Valley than did the neatness of his linen collar and his shaped gray coat.

"How did you get here, please?" Jinny asked him.

A careless nod down the draw might have indicated anything this side of the distant mountain-notched horizon. "I spied a ranch house over there, across the creek. I was making my way to it. They would tell me my direction. Then"—he smiled rather disagreeably at her—"I happened to notice a man riding out of this gully. I don't know —I can't tell you—what caused me to switch up here, instead of continuing on across to the ranch house." Again the disagreeable quality came into his voice and eyes. "Something fortunate. An omen, an augury."

Said Jinny, gravely: "The road is over across there."

"Road? Pardon me. I don't want the road. I don't want anything, as a cheerful matter of fact, for a few minutes. Except to be allowed to remain right here." He

bowed slightly toward the wikiup. "Is that your plumy arbor?"

"Yes."

"It's very charming. Is it the only home you've got?"

"I live in the log ranch house you saw."

"Ah! Then you're not really, after all, the dryad of these pale-stemmed trees?"

His small, dark mustache made his teeth seem extraordinarily white. Jinny found herself smiling with him, almost against her will. "This is just a kind of baby playhouse I built for myself," she informed him.

"And, after it, you can go back to a stupid and ugly log cabin!" He had stepped up near to the edge of the wikiup yard. "May I look?"

Without waiting her answer, he was about to push on over the stone border into the circular cleared space beyond. But, with instant sharpest change of voice and manner, the girl forbade it.

"No! Not in here, please!"

The stranger, startled by the abrupt and positive vehemence of her challenge, backed off, bowed. "Certainly—certainly not, if you don't wish it."

She explained, almost contritely: "Nobody ever does.'

"Ah! Then there *is* fairy work here. Nobody ever penetrates that woodsy magic circle?"

"Nobody ever comes across the stones into my wikiup yard. Not even daddy—I mean, not even my father or uncle. I'm the only girl for twenty miles up and down this valley. The only woman."

The young fellow whistled, then smiled his scoffing and detached smile, which had such scant mirth in it. "Hel-lo! Are you that? What an unconscionable little tyrant you must be!"

"We've lived here six years. It's lonely, sometimes. And not having any other woman to go to, I suppose—no mother or sister——"

"Wait!" he cried, striking his brow. "*I* remember you. Isn't your name——" He racked his brain futilely, as she earlier had, on the first sight of him. Biting and twisting at the ends of his small, black mustache, he stared fixedly at the ground.

To relieve the embarrassment, Jinny neutrally proffered her name.

"Yes—thank you—that's it—Hailton. I distinctly remember having heard my aunt speak of you. Three years ago. Aunt Margot told us about you. A young girl—a child—living all by herself out here, among a parcel of men."

Said Jinny: "I don't know who you are."

"You wouldn't. I was never in this country before. I'm a tenderfoot. But I'm here now, to grow up with the stockmen's dollars. My uncle brought me out from Chicago. So we're neighbors, you see."

"What's your uncle's name?"

"Ah, to be sure! I forgot to mention that, didn't I? Staten, Leo Staten. My name's Bernhardt. Son of Mr. Leo Staten's only sister, from Chicago, to make the story complete." He bowed. "Paul Bernhardt, at your service."

So! That was it, then. Yes, now it all came to her, in a flash. He was a Staten.

She shrank back a step inside her yard. "Then you've just come now—from the sheep ranch——"

He noted the alteration in her voice, the brusque movement of repulsion. "Yes."

"You'd better go," motioned Jinny. "Quick! And don't keep on over to that ranch house. I can direct you."

"But," he demanded, "why? What's this—my dismissal—so all of a sudden——"

"You'd better not stay to talk. It's dangerous for you to be here."

"Dangerous? How—dangerous? Why—dangerous?"

"This is a cattle ranch."

"Well. And then—what?"

"That's enough of itself," stated Jinny bitterly. "But there *is* more."

"And what is the rest, if I may inquire?"

"It's Green Bow Ranch, this. Hailton and Riggs own it." She faltered. "But—not clear—not now. Your uncle holds a—a claim—against it."

"A claim?"

"He holds a three-thousand-dollar mortgage."

"I'm sorry. Still, there's nothing so very extraordinary about that, is there? Uncle Leo is a banker. He must make a good many mortgage investments. It's unfortunate, of course, that you had to borrow——"

Jinny pointed up the draw, to the eastward. "Your way is round the foot of that wooded butte. You can't miss it. Seven miles to your home ranch."

Paul Bernhardt shrugged, rather wearily. "I swear to you, I don't understand a word. Not one. Is there some brand of infamy on

me? Of what are you so fearful, for Heaven's safe?"

"The horse and cattle people of this county are not friendly with your uncle."

He impatiently tossed his cap into the air and caught it. "Now, I must really try to make some reason out of all this, you know," he announced determinedly. "I'm in Montana, as I tell you, for the first time, and probably for good. I'm going to be cashier, eventual manager, of uncle Leo's bank. At least, that's the plan. But, to the present, I've enjoyed soulful residence in Burnt Robe only two days. You say the horse and cattle people of this county are not friendly with my uncle?"

"It's more," interrupted Jinny, "than just common unfriendliness."

"Well, I don't attempt to argue. What I know is merely this: Uncle Leo owns the town bank. He owns half the town business property and real estate. He owns a number of ranches. He's the financial and executive head of Staten, Barr & Brinker, merchants. And, finally, through his bank and in another partnership with Barr and Brinker, he's lately put rather a lot of money into sheep."

"*We* know Staten, Barr & Brinker," declared Jinny, flushing. "They've ruined us."

"How, if I may bother you again?"

"You've just said. Green Bow is a wonderful prize of a ranch. We took it up six years ago, in the spring of seventy-five, when Indians still came into this valley. We've lived on the place through thick and thin ever since. Daddy and uncle Lige have worked like slaves, putting back into improvements every cent of money they made out of their cattle. But that's nothing to Staten, Barr & Brinker. The more improvements the better! This is the star ranch of Agate Valley, and Staten, Barr & Brinker need it for their sheep. They've bought and had their people file for them on all the land roundabout us, unwatered land, worthless. They couldn't get water on their land, even if they had the creek rights, which they haven't. It was only to hedge us in.

"But before we ever began to suspect anything, they encouraged us, with long credit, to launch in deep on farm machinery at their store. Timber and fence and haymaking machinery. We had a couple of bad seasons, too, and your uncle's bank offered to lend us money. Mr. Staten drove out here himself and *offered* it. We jumped at the kindness"—the girl bit her lip fiercely, to keep back the tears—"and then, gradually, we saw. We *had* to see. For we'd swallowed the bait. Staten, Barr & Brinker are trying to break us. They're trying to force us to quit. They've fixed it so we can't sell to anybody else. Our range is gone. They've got us completely shut in. Green Bow is now as useless for stock as—as twelve hundred and eighty acres of alkali desert. To everybody on earth, that is, except Staten, Barr & Brinker!"

"H'm," muttered Paul thoughtfully.

Then he suggested—"Rich men are often unjustly hated, though. They *have* to branch out, you would admit, if you were a banker. They have to be finding constant new channels for their money. You're sure you're positively all right in this matter of the conspiracy and persecution?"

"You don't understand yet. It's so serious that nobody wants to talk about it."

"Well, a neat, healthy blind of a showdown *I'm* being let in for, at this rate!" He took a few random steps about among the trees. "And you think you won't be able to meet the attachment the bank holds against your place?"

"We could easily, with a little grace. We didn't come out here penniless. And our cattle had begun to do so well. We were planning to buy back the claim next year. But now your people won't allow us. They've got us smothered. Green Bow is done for. They've stolen all the range."

"Still," protested Paul, "as I remember it, the country's free and open. We—this uncle of mine, he's an American citizen. Hasn't he as fair a right as another——"

"We were here first!" cried Jinny hotly, her hazel eyes wide and burning. "We braved dangers to live here. We run cattle. There's not enough range for all. And cattle and horses won't feed over ground after sheep."

Jinny had a sudden swift, woman's glint, half humorous, half vindictive, of the dissatisfaction which Leo Staten must be feeling in the discovery of this rather aloof and fastidious nephew, so unbusinesslike, so broadly impossible in the tradition laid down for him.

"Your uncle is a mighty reckless and headstrong man, *we* think," she offered aloud. "His bank has lent money to nearly every rancher in these two valleys. He's got a notion, evidently, that he owns us, that he

can do as he chooses, ride over everybody." She hesitated. "If you're going to be with him in the bank, you'd better warn him. He's taken to putting up wild fences now."

"Wild fences?"

"Fencing up unsurveyed government land. They're trying to block us out of Two-Sleep Cañon and all the miles of open range beyond."

Paul vented his shrugging laugh, with the tinge of melancholy in it. "My dear young lady! Don't you know you should never go bobbing up among your rich relatives with good advice? They don't like it. They resent it. Besides, don't you know that the only good advice anybody ever takes is what he already wanted to hear?"

"Please, I *wish* you'd go!" pressed Jinny, in quick reversion. "I *wish* you would, please! Before anything happens."

"All right. I'll go. It's rough luck, though, isn't it? For you see, though my family destines me for the banking, I'm really fond of poetry and that sort of rubbish. Which is a weakness, of course, unprofitable. I even write bad verses myself. I should love to read them to you. Ah, truly, it would be no end of fun—to be able to ride out here and surprise you in your romantic haunts—but—you tell me I mayn't?"

"Certainly not!" corroborated Jinny, with emphasis.

"So. And I could bring you some thrilling books I have. You read books?"

"Yes. *Please* hurry!"

"By the bye. I wonder if you don't ever go in to town sometimes?"

What unaccountable slant of perdition began to cross the straightness of that lonely ranch girl's mind? "I believe we're going in to town this afternoon." Her dimple had never been more subtly alive and elusive and mysterious.

"Indeed? And I, also. But I suppose I couldn't hope to be so lucky as to chance on you there?"

It was madness—and Alec Hailton's daughter could not plead utter unintelligence—to breathe another syllable. Yet—"I believe I'm going to the mask ball tonight," she mentioned artlessly.

Paul Bernhardt's thin nostrils dilated the least iota with excitement. "Masked Ball? In Burnt Robe? To-night?"

She verified with nods. "At the town hall."

"If I," he proposed, with his slow, cynical smile—"if I were to be at that masked ball in Burnt Robe to-night, would you give me a dance?"

"No! Oh, no!"

"We'd both be safe hid away in costume, wouldn't we? Nobody need ever guess. I'd have to find you, naturally—pick you out of all the crowd. But I'd undertake not to make any mistake in that."

Jinny resolutely shook her small, keen-poised head, on which the coils of brown hair were now very loose indeed. "I couldn't dream of dancing with you."

"Then why, I wonder, did you bother to pique my attention?"

"I don't know. I'm sorry."

He laughed good-humoredly. "Don't be sorry. But magic circles and mask balls are extremely ticklish matters, you must remember. In the spring, above all. They go to one's head. However, you want me to hurry. Well, I'm off. Would you indulge my curiosity first, though? On a single, trifling point?"

"What is it?"

"I should like very much, for a reason, to have a hint of your Christian name."

"Who would mind telling that? It's Virginia."

"Hear, hear!" applauded Staten's cynical nephew. "I half knew it. Virginia! And my name's Paul."

The girl stared uncomprehendingly at him. "But everybody calls me Jinny," she went on.

"I understand," he assured her. "I'm off."

But the words had not more than escaped his lips before a sudden pounding of horses' hoofs leaped up into the clear air somewhere out of the surrounding distance.

CHAPTER V.

"Oh!" cried Jinny. "It's too late!"

Instinctively, peering among the stems of the trees, she strained her eyes first toward the ranch house. But, seeing nothing in that direct quarter, she hastily looked across th wide and broken entrance of the draw to the south.

"Why—why!" she marveled. And then: "Oh, thank gracious! It's some of your own people! Isn't that Mr. Staten riding the bay horse?"

"Yes," he said. "That's uncle Leo, fast enough. And Slater on the iron-gray."

"How *dare* they set foot on this ranch!" stormed Jinny.

"There. You see. The case evidently isn't quite so bad as you make out."

Going off to his sorrel pinto, he untied it from the tree. By that time Staten and his sheep foreman were close at hand, sweeping up the lower side of the draw on the jump. Glued by terror, Jinny remained standing in front of her wikiup. Paul did not compromise so far as to mount his pinto. He waited afoot, idly flipping the ends of his long bridle reins between finger and thumb.

Staten and Slater, abruptly plunging out of the strong sun glare into the dappled shadow of the trees, pulled up hard beside him. Leo Staten carried a pair of big field glasses slung in a leather sheath. A squarely heavy, alert, authoritative-mannered man of fifty-three, dull red in color always, but crimson now, he was brutally set, fuming with rage.

"How the devil," he rapped out at Paul, "did you ever come to find your way over here?"

"It seems comparatively simple," the young man returned with quietude. "I got off the track. I came toward the only house I happened to see in my travels."

Leo Staten grunted his notion of the character and attainments of such a nephew. "This was no place for you to strike in. Rustle, now—climb that pony. We'll be moving on at once."

But in the rift of the same breath, with arresting shock, the ignored Jinny spoke up. She was again in the throes of obvious panic, wavering slightly from side to side on her feet, alternately covering and uncovering her eyes with her hands. "Oh!" she wailed. "Daddy, uncle Lige, Wagonwheel, Louie!"

The three intruders from beyond the butte seemed to grasp her cryptic tabulation of names perfectly. All stared off toward the Green Bow ranch house with silent intentness. Gradually, the driving headlong clatter of hoofbeats began to rise a second time out of the midday lake of still, warm valley air.

Staten whirled in his saddle to Slater. "By Heaven, Joe! This is bad. They're on to us. And they're packing Winchesters."

"I notice the Winchesters," commented Slater dryly.

"This girl—she's the apple of their eye. If they think we've been playing horse with her any——" Staten, dubious, queried his foreman flat. "Shall we make a duck for it? Up the draw?"

"Nope," adjudged Slater. "That'd never do now. We'd only be likely to collect a hatful of .44 slugs—in the back."

Paul calmly affirmed: "I, for one, shan't stir. Why should I?"

"No, naturally!" snarled his red-faced uncle. "Not *you!* After having got us all into this!"

Slater was meditatively sighting down his wrinkled and spatulate nose. "A six-shooter ain't of much force against a Winchester," he remarked. "But might either of you gents be wearing one?"

"Joe!" exclaimed Staten. "How often do I have to tell you? I *never* go armed. The law is my arm."

"Oh, sure," assented the sheep foreman. "Sure, sure." He rolled his tobacco from cheek to cheek. "All the same, if I was in your boots, Mr. Staten, making little expeditions out a ways like this, I wouldn't fret none at the weight of a gun on me somewheres. I would not. I'd be plumb proud of the feel of it." He turned to Paul for his answer.

"My revolver is lying in the top bureau drawer of my room," the boy reported.

"Well, well. Might we kneel down and say kind of a word of family prayers, hey, do you s'pose?" Nobody responded to this acute witticism; and, philosophically, the lean, tough foreman resigned himself. "I expect you wouldn't be of much use, anyway—neither of you." He loosened the big Colt in his own belt. "I'll just have this one eased. But I won't attempt to pull her unless things begin to work up mighty hot and permiscuous. I got too much respect for them Winchesters, I have."

The hammering Green Bow hoofbeats, crowded into the funnel of the upper draw, were making the aspen leaves above their heads tremble. Slater, who had automatically risen to the domination of the Staten party in this swift range crisis, flicked out his brief orders to uncle and nephew.

"Your play is to sing small. Keep your hands where they can see 'em all the time. And if they say 'March,' get a wiggle on to you, march quick. Don't stand on no good-by ceremonies."

Paul leisurely mounted his pinto. Almost before he was secure in the saddle Hailton, Riggs, Wagonwheel Sims, and Louie

Lilyard came volleying in among the outermost trees. The two Green Bow partners and Wagonwheel had Winchesters carried up close to their narrowed eyes. Louie, ranch cook, wildly waved a cocked six-shooter.

"Daddy, uncle Lige!" called Jinny sharply.

Hailton and Riggs stopped and pantingly reconnoitered the situation. Wagonwheel, of course, could never properly celebrate any unusual occasion without a bit of a blood-curdling puncher yell. Louie, as his diminutive buckskin cayuse dexterously sat back on its haunches, grinned from ear to ear and exulted over the sheepmen with brandished revolver.

"Ain't I been tole you?" he bellowed to Hailton and Riggs. "Ain't I been tole you so ? Yah, from das kitchen I see 'em. Ha, ha, ha! Dey lick das pony, dey t'ink dey scoot t'rough all right." He glared amazedy at Paul. "But *two*—I been see only *two* riders——"

"Who is this third man?" Hailton bleakly put to Staten.

"And *I* say," retorted Staten, "what kind of high-handed treatment——"

Hailton snapped the lever of his gun. "Talk up. Who's the third man?"

"My nephew."

"How did he get here?"

"He's a pilgrim. Just new from the States two days ago. Lost his way—wandered over here by mistake. We saw his horse through the glass and came after him."

Not very well content, Alec Hailton, over his broken nose, fastened a grim eye on Paul. "I'll ask you a question," he stated.

Young Bernhardt shrugged. "That seems humanly reasonable."

"Do you think you've got these valley distances and directions firmly fixed in your mind now?"

"I think so."

"Better be dead sure," cautioned Hailton. "Don't ever make this mistake again."

Riggs unconsciously sidled his horse over closer toward him.

"In spite of everything we could do," Hailton specified to the sheepman, "you've gone straight ahead and bottled up Two-Sleep Cañon. We're warning you now to take that fence out. You hear, Slater? We're giving you fair warning. Tear that fence out." He motioned significantly with the barrel of his rifle to the entire Staten party. "We've had our say. Travel."

CHAPTER VI.

Jinny worked rapidly on the dance costume right up to the last minute before she must dress for town. She could sew very decently, for a ranch girl. From Harrisburg her aunt Lizbeth kept her plentifully supplied with patterns and with seamstress good advice. Also had Jinny some ideas of her own about such crucial businesses. She made all her clothes.

Not that this masquerade costume for tonight, though, was really "clothes," in the precise civilized sense. It was only an Ogallalla Sioux girl's dress; perhaps for her marriage, or some such gala occasion; head band and leggings and tunic of fawnskin, very beautifully put together, fine and soft and shapely. Jinny hadn't herself designed or sewed these primitive garments. They had been made for an actual Ogallalla girl,

About four o'clock, Hailton and Riggs hooked up the ranch driving team to the light spring wagon, and notified Jinny they were waiting. After the tardy one had subjected them to a go of essential feminine flurry, they got her and her flaming blanket and her various bags of aboriginal fripperies snugly ensconced on the back seat. Hailton climbed up beside her. Riggs drove.

The passing road here ran between house and stables, on the one hand, and upper drinking dam, sheds, and corrals, on the other. Giving the rein to his quick-footed buckskins, Lige had barely skirted the corner of a square hay corral, throwing the valley open in a long, gray-green vista below them, when a lanky rider on a roan mare swung round the lowermost point of rocks into that vista. The three in the ranch wagon spied him simultaneously.

"Who is it, Lige?" asked Hailton.

Riggs stared through his large, silver-rimmed spectacles fixedly. "Jiggered if I can make out."

"Isn't it that baldheaded, ugly cowboy they call Flannen?" said Jinny, from her robe-cushioned nook in the back seat.

For a moment, all the bitterness and menace dropped out of Lige Riggs' grizzled face. He was not Jinny's uncle by anything except courtesy and intimate shy habit and the mutual desire that he assume the part. He had never married, could claim few blood ties in the world. But this child of his partner, so lately sprung into a woman—Jinny sufficed him for every item in the whole

circle he had missed. Even more than her father, he idolized her.

"Eyes like a gopher, she's got!" he chuckled now, glancing back over his shoulder, his own small, faded, reddish eyes blinking and gleaming. "A regular young Injun lookout, by hokey!"

"He ought to be ashamed!" declared Jinny, still peering down the road. "The way he's riding that tired horse!"

"Flannen Lloyd?" Hailton queried Riggs. "Wasn't he one of Dave Barrensen's all-winter crew?"

"He was, sure."

"And that Dakota drive of Dave's—it was to have set out this morning, wasn't it? I wonder if some of the horses didn't tear loose, break away from 'em?"

"Wouldn't be surprised," agreed Riggs. "They're wicked and ornery enough, them Double K cayuses, to break out of Gehenna!"

The Green Bow buckskins trotted smoothly along beside the comely down-creek taper of meadow, and Flannen Lloyd, on his roan mare, lunged unevenly from wheel rut to wheel rut toward them. Rider and driver, as they met, each pulled up.

"Hey!" demanded the cowboy, shooting his weight over in the off-stirrup and raking with a big splay hand under the brim of his hat. "Excuse *me*, ladies and gents. But you folks ain't just organized to go weaving into town, are you?"

Hailton answered. "You've guessed it, Flannen, first trip."

"Well, well, well!" mumbled Lloyd. He straightened abruptly in his saddle, to keep the roan mare from sagging off her feet. "Well, well!" Disgust with himself, and with anything pretending to be an ordered and coherent scheme of universe, could go no further in the human animal.

"What's the matter?" said Riggs. "You seem as if you'd been pushing your pony some."

"And that's about right, too, friend," the lanky puncher morosely admitted.

"Any special rush?"

"Only that 'Buffalo' Jenks told me not to spare no hossflesh in chasing out to you."

"What does Sheriff Jenks want with us?" Hailton put curtly.

"Oh, nothing official, Alec, you savvy. Nothing like that. This is just Buffalo in his private personal feathers. That's all. Dave Barrensen's dead."

"Dead?" The Green Bow men were stupefied. "*Dead*, did you say?"

Flannen yawned prodigiously. "As a hammer."

"Why, Flannen! Wasn't it just this morning he was to have started his horses overland—for Dakota?"

"This morning one of his hosses started *him* overland—for the happy hunting grounds!" The hard rider squinted implacably down at his mare again, who was heaving convulsively on wide-propped legs.

Hailton and Riggs were not strange to the note of stockman tragedy. Hailton's broken nose and scarred cheek told of a certain hair-line escape. Yet, the appalling suddenness of this present blow stilled their hearts for a second. Dave Barrensen had been their friend.

"It's took six of us since come March," Flannen was vindictively going on, "to get these here five hundred roan man-killers together. But there they are *now*, all right. Plumb ready and on tiptoe."

"Pitch ahead, Flannen," said Alec Hailton, rousing. "You've got something on your mind."

The lanky rider shoved back his hat, disclosing the beginnings of an elaborate baldness. "You two is cow people. But I expect you savvy whether the Dakota hoss market's up or not, this spring?"

"Yes?" the Green Bow pair sympathetically encouraged.

"Which," exclaimed Flannen, "here is the five hundred king-pins of the best in the Territory. Clean! You run 'em uphill to rest 'em, is our rule. And Dave, too, just before he cashed in—him whispering your names to us, plain as day. He sure wanted you both, or one or t'other of you—we couldn't follow all his drift—but he sure wanted you gents to take the band. To swivel right in and slam the ponies along over to the cars. Make the drive, same as he was going to do. I got a feeling his woman needs the money."

The Green Bow partners exchanged quick, taut looks, interested and deliberative.

"Us?" murmured Hailton. And then, to Flannen: "Buffalo is Dave's executor, did you say?"

"I guess that's about the courthouse of her. He's took things in charge out there some, you can bet. I rode in for the missus and him first off this morning, and he's had the bunch of us jumping sideways ever

since." Ruefully the baldheaded puncher rubbed at his flattened stomach. "I ain't seen no sign of blasted dinner yet!"

They all laughed. It seemed, somehow, despite the cloud of muffled ferocity, despite the fact of Dave Barrensen's painful death —it seemed easier to laugh on this ranch now. A tension had slacked. Hailton and Riggs, in their silent, long-practiced fashion, consulted each other again with the eyes.

"And here we were, lighting straight in for town, anyway!" avouched Riggs, almost gayly. "Might have saved yourself all the gaudy exercise, Flannen. Tumble off your pony and crawl into the wagon. Blue antelope or none, she's had about plenty, that mare has, for one while."

Willingly, the cowboy dismounted and hauled himself up into the front seat beside Riggs. The latter clucked, wheeled his buckskins, and instantly they were skirting the meadow in the opposite direction, the horses' swinging noses pointed toward the just-quitted ranch house.

"Yes," considered Hailton, planning aloud. "Then, after you've fed up, Flannen, we'll carry you back in along with us, if that's your game."

It was his game, Flannen admitted; and, upon due observance of the material preliminaries, carry him and his saddle back into town with them they did. Only the roan mare failed to accompany them.

CHAPTER VII.

Robert Pearson Rayburn Jenks, popularly answering hereabouts to the diminutive of "Buffalo," sheriff of Breed County, had an office, naturally, in the county seat. It was a room in the front left-hand corner of Steve Mowbrey's White Elephant livery barn, on Frisco Street.

The sheriff, entering his bare official sanctum through a side door from the White Elephant, dropped heavily into a chair before his flat-topped desk, and began at once to sort through and read a number of folded papers he took from his coat pocket. Darkness briefly settled down in the room, small-windowed, and not too clean paned; and Buffalo scowlingly rose and lighted a couple of dingy bracket lamps.

He was still absorbed in his study of the papers when the street door opened and Leo Staten tramped an imposing two steps into the place.

"Evening, sheriff," said the banker. "I was just passing, and noticed you in here alone. Have a cigar."

Buffalo reared back in his chair and accepted the Havana. "Howdy, Mr. Staten. Make yourself to home."

The great man sat, and for several perfunctory minutes they discussed the accident in the upper Brightwater. Then, with his accustomed brusque energy, Staten abruptly barked out: "Jenks, I hear there's some rooted opposition to the bringing of sheep into this country."

"Yes," assented Buffalo, dry and blank and neutral as a chip. "I hear there is."

"It's useless, Jenks. You might just as well object to the coming of winter or summer."

"*I* ain't objecting none," protested Buffalo.

Oblivious, Staten went on: "There's undeniably a strong feeling against us. My people out on the edge of the Agate report some pretty bold threats. We may have to call on you to step in, out there."

"Step in?" inquired Buffalo interestedly.

"To enforce the law."

"That's my business, all right," said the sheriff. "Enforcing the law is."

"Exactly. I take it you're appointed for that purpose. You draw a certain collectable salary. With perquisites. Primarily, for enforcing the law."

"When I know," Buffalo blandly slid in, "what the law is."

The sheepman stared at him from under contracted brows. "We'll have a better knowledge of the law in this country, after a while." Then he leaned confidentially toward Buffalo. "Jenks, there are going to be some enormous changes here in the next five or ten years. *Enormous!*"

"Maybe so," nodded Buffalo, blowing reflective rings. "I wouldn't go for to doubt it."

"Yes. Politics are just being born with us. We can take time for that now. The big and influential men of the country—them with the brains and the snap—they're getting ready to throw all their money and power into the new field. You'll see, Jenks! The Territory will do as they say."

"Well," mused Buffalo, "if I was still holding onto a gun job in them days you mention, and wanted to play dead safe, you get me, it sure wouldn't be to no politician I'd

go, to strengthen my hand. Not a little bit, I wouldn't! I'd go to the head crook or rustler of my bailiwick."

"Why so?"

"Because I'd figure he'd still be the sharp most likely to separate me from them official duties and emoluments I prized so much that a way."

"Jenks," said Staten. "About this matter of the sheep. If I were to ask you to ride out into the Agate, and speak a word here and there, could you do it?"

"I sure ain't much of a speaker," Buffalo demurred.

"But just to show where you stand in this threat racket."

"Well, Mr. Staten," Buffalo regretfully returned, "I don't hardly savvy how I can mix in. I don't, really. Not till there's been some wide-open trouble."

"Then," snapped the sheepman banker, "I can depend on the law for no protection?"

"The law? Sure thing! What's the county courthouse for?"

Leo Staten sneered bitingly. "I'll put my proposition another way. I can depend on *you—your office*—for no protection?"

"Listen here, Mr. Man," Buffalo reasoned. "I pick up plenty of loose talk floating round about you folks getting down to hooks out there on the Agate. But I don't take no stock in it whatever, I don't. For why not?"

"For why not?" ridiculed the other.

"Because I see with my own eyes you ain't gone plumb crazy hoss wild and loco, like these stories make out. That's why."

Leo Staten rose and started angrily for the street door. "In which case, I'll undertake to protect myself," he promised.

"That's right, that's right," commended Buffalo. "You always got the law dead with you there, Mr. Staten. What does the Good Book say? Self-protection is the first law of nature."

With a kick at the door, the great man of Burnt Robe and Breed County disappeared into the outer spring night. And peace-loving Mr. Jenks, a big blued .45 strapped on his hip, and a twist of lip that smacked more of weariness than of humorous zest flickering behind his scant, reddish beard—Sheriff Robert Pearson Rayburn Jenks readdressed himself to the little heaps of legal documents spread out on the gritty desk before him.

CHAPTER VIII.

He was still laboriously reading and sorting when, half an hour later, a second interruption befell. This time it was the side door from the stable that opened. Hailton, Riggs, and Jinny quietly filed into the room, and Buffalo's glowering attention again swerved from his clerkly task.

"Howdy, boys," the sheriff greeted them. "Missy, evening. Excuse an old man for not prancing up to greet you. Find chairs, everybody. I'm powerful glad to see you here. Camp down." He glanced shrewdly from face to face, settling in the end on Hailton. "This looks as if you'd chased right in to talk turkey."

And it was Alec, as usual, who responded. "Mighty friendly of you to think of us, Buffalo."

"Awful! Let's get straight down to cases about the ponies, boys. Maybe if I can swing that off my mind——"

Hailton asked, promptly: "What sort of terms are being canvassed?"

"It's like this," stated the sheriff. "Mrs. Barrensen's going back East. She'll prob'ly close out everything here. But, anyway, she's going home pronto to visit her mother in Michigan. Bob Richards is Dave's lawyer, and she's passing the whole works over onto him and me. We thrashed our lead moves out to-day. Them ponies has got to be sold. Quick! Dave's wife is shy of ready money, and she don't want the responsibility of selling herself. She ain't up to no responsibility, nohow. And, as for *keeping* the pack of cussed, murdering brutes——"

"No. She doesn't ever want to lay eyes on them, naturally."

"Well," resumed Buffalo, "we're going to bury Dave at eight in the morning. He's all smashed up, and we got to rustle him into the ground. Methodist parson's tipped off for eight sharp. But the ponies? Listen, boys. You two whirl in out there and take them five hundred devils of picked hosses off of Mrs. Barrensen's hands—say, by seven o'clock——"

The Green Bow partners involuntarily sat forward on the edges of their chairs.

"Say, by seven o'clock to-morrow morning," Buffalo impressively repeated, "you two whirl in out there at the upper valley and hook onto that clutter of five hundred Double K cayuses—and you're clear half owners in the band!" He reared back and

crossed his dusty, high-booted legs. "Dave's wife offers you a solid half share to make the sale."

Alec Hailton lifted up and took a rapid turn about the room. "That sounds free enough, Lige."

The small, faded eyes of the junior partner glinted. "You deal ahead, Alec. You make the running. What does you, does me."

"Bully for you!" cried the sheriff. He matched Hailton's snap of finger with a resounding thwack on the thigh. "That's the good word. I saw them Double K antelopes to-day. They're pretty stuff. You frisk 'em over onto the spring market and you clean up a hatful of money."

"What agreement?"

"Give bond, and sell the band in Dakota inside of six weeks. That's all."

Jinny, who had through the brief colloquy been squirming on a chair by the Frisco Street window, shifted her eyes outward and caught sudden sight of a big rider on a Roman-nosed bay horse. The rider, curving into the arch of the White Elephant from the street, traversed the rays of a hanging stable lantern, and Jinny marked him plain. He had a large, neat, light-colored packet clamped under his left arm.

"There goes Drift Weir into the barn," she irrelevantly announced.

"Drift Weir?" Buffalo reared back in his favorite furniture-cracking pose. "That's a point, now. You two don't want to overlook for a minute, Alec, that you'll have to grab a topnotch buster and boss wrangler for this job. You cowmen couldn't do it."

Using the direct door into the stable, the shaggy little Green Bow man swiftly went and came, introducing, on his return, a grave and placid barbaric giant to the assembled company. Drift still wore his hair chaps and dragging spurs. His face gave absolutely no hint of recent volcanic events at the Candlestick. Nor, from the smoothness of his appearance, would anybody have been likely to suspect that he had covered perhaps eighty long miles in the saddle this day.

Recognition of Jinny, though, broke his blond English phlegm into a grin of embarrassed pleasure, and he shuffled slightly with his feet.

"Half shares!" Drift was exclaiming, as he swished and jangled in. "Say, that's bang up, that is." He nodded right and left, and found Jinny's subtly critical smile resting on him, and forthwith forgot all about the notorious Barrensen blue antelopes, their blood and carryings on.

Hailton rudely shunted him back to the matter in hand. "Drift, we've undertaken this band for seven o'clock to-morrow morning. Not twelve hours off. We've got to have a foreman—boss-wrangle and ride. It's a bad prospect, of course, with the regular round-ups all starting out. You can't think of anybody that would do?"

The unhorsed black-and-gray centaur swayed and hitched at his broad belt. "Well, *I* happen to be out of a job, right now."

"*You!*" shouted Hailton and Riggs, in one voice.

"Oh, Drift!"—that, later and with remorseful reproach, from Jinny.

"Yep." The emotional disturbance of the girl's presence made the big fellow squint and drawl, and he kept fiddling at his belt. "Old man Crossett done up and fired me this evening."

"And where are your blankets now?" asked Hailton.

Drift suavely explained: "Oh, I'm going to sleep at the hotel to-night."

"He never *let* you roll your blankets, did he?" chuckled Riggs, clapping his fine watchmaker's hands. "He never let you *get* your blankets!"

"Well," Drift admitted, "I sure thought I'd seen the old man mad up to the hilt—times enough before this. But I was away off. I hadn't."

Tongue in cheek, Sheriff Jenks oracularly commented: "No?"

"No," went on Drift. "And I sure hate to see a man, 'specially an old man like that, let himself get so dang red-headed and spraddled out. It ain't dignified."

"What was she all about?" Riggs inquired.

"Oh, I reckon he was kind of uneasy and pawing and sniffing the wind, anyway. He's a good hossman, old man Crossett is. Sometimes you'd swear he *was* a scary, cranky old scout of a range hoss."

"My, my," ruminated Buffalo. "So it was only the spell of the round-up, then, sort of preying onto him?"

"Well," Drift reluctantly yielded, "it seems like he's got a couple of conscientious scruples dragging their picket pins around through his mind."

Hailton, who had been lost in some inner preoccupation, came up into the present. "Scruples, scruples?"

"He figures it ain't healthy for his punch-

ers to be dancing too much that a way in the spring. He says it's bad for the blood."

"Ah!" breathed Jinny. "I *guessed* maybe the dance might creep in, after a while."

Buffalo was roaring and rearing and slapping his thigh. "You must have had that poor old man riled up plenty, you big, yellow Skowegian, you! I know just how he felt. It's a wonder he didn't bust you with a Winchester."

"Some of the boys was hovering ready to claw onto him," Drift replied simply.

"I know exactly to a hair how he felt," repeated Buffalo to Hailton and Riggs. "Dave Barrensen had four extra wranglers hired for the Dakota drive. And blamed if every last one of the bunch of 'em didn't break away from me and chase themselves into town, here, for this dance! Regular Double K home crew, short-handed, holding the herd out to-night. That's the only thing saved me. If I hadn't been one long-suffering, peace-abiding minion of the law——"

Mr. Weir grinned appreciatively. "I spotted them four punchers whooping it up toward Laramy's."

"But—Drift." Hailton fastened on him, intent, planning. "As soon as old Jared Crossett comes to his senses—he's got a boy burning up the road this minute, to take you back with him."

"Not me!" Grimly the ex-Candlestick foreman repelled the idea. "No, sir, it wouldn't be no use, Alec. Not if he had a dozen boys! I hope I ain't stuck up none, nor thin-skinned. But that there frothing old hombre of a Yank—he yelped out a gulletful of names at me! Nope, we sure quit on bad terms, the old gentleman and me did."

"It's all my fault," Jinny insisted to her father. "Drift wasn't *dreaming* of riding in to this dance. I dared him to."

Everything about the barbaric giant betokened his charmed soul. "Old man Crossett ain't got the Candlestick burned onto *me* anywhere yet, has he?"

"Well, Lige," proposed Hailton. "We're not quarreling with Providence."

Buffalo tilted up his forked beard. "I should rattle—*not!* Cinch right onto him."

"Maybe,' said Drift. "I wasn't going to hang on with the Candlestick always, anyway. Maybe I'm going to jump into a ranch pronto for myself." Warily he glimpsed to see if this would have an effect on the naïve armor of Jinny. But he could distinguish no dent.

"Are you," Buffalo put to the Green Bow men, "aiming to hire them four roustabouts that thumbed their noses at me?"

For answer, Hailton swung to Drift. "You'll take the blue antelopes over to Dakota for us?"

The furtive-questing blue eyes had to forsake Jinny's direction. "I sure will, sir. The pleasure will be all mine."

"Then fire ahead. Make up your own crew."

"The bunch down at Laramy's is agreeable to me. They're fair hoss hands, and Lincoln and Malone has been over the trail before."

"Tie up with 'em on the dot! Lige and I'll have to be out tending to matters with Buffalo for a while."

Riggs beckoned Jinny toward the stable door. "I'll squire our little girl and her traps down to the hotel. She can be getting ready then, so as to go along with Mrs. Aylward to the ball."

Across the room, Jinny winged Drift a wordless promise that she would wait the famous "opener" dance for him. As Riggs' hand was on the knob of the side door, to let Jinny and himself out into the stable where their dunnage still lay on the seats of the wagon, Hailton interposed.

"Just before you go, Lige. So Drift can arrange with his punchers. We'll be mighty busy at the ranch all day to-morrow. Where shall we hold these five hundred overland horses to-morrow night? They ought to have good grass."

The Green Bow partners stared fixedly at each other. "Two-Sleep Cañon would be a first-class place," Riggs propounded slowly.

"Oh!" whispered Jinny.

"I was thinking of Two-Sleep myself," and Hailton nodded in metallic accord to Riggs.

Buffalo grunted. "H'm. You reckon that's a dead safe holding ground for a parcel of wild hosses, this season of the year?"

"Why not?" inquired Riggs, in the boding formidable way of his, without heat. "There's the best range in our end of the valley around Two-Sleep Cañon."

Drift Weir made haste to proclaim: "Two-Sleep Cañon suits *me* plenty strong."

"Well," said Buffalo, flipping out his hands, "you folks for it. You ought to know where the feed is, in your own country. *I* don't." He creakingly got up. "If we're

going to ketch Bob Richards for this job before he's too drunk to sign his name, we'll have to be moseying."

He turned down the pair of dingy lamps in the wall brackets. Riggs and Jinny, followed by Drift, disappeared from the room into the deeper shadow of the White Elephant. Hailton and Buffalo stepped at once through the other door into Frisco Street.

CHAPTER IX.

Truly was Burnt Robe in festal mood tonight. The infection of gayety tingled like a spark through the spring air. Jinny Hailton wore her flaming blanket over the Ogallalla fawnskin, and she had three long eagle feathers, dyed scarlet, in her plaited hair. Drift could scarcely feel the weight of her hand on his arm. Himself hulking and not too light-footed in the monstrous balloon of clown suit, he enjoyed his first dance with her to the jubilant dregs. Then, heroically passing her over to Charlie Flood, he hied himself up to the shallow rudimentary little gallery which extended across the hall.

He didn't want to dance with any other girl. Besides, he must make sure, before the evening got going too fast, of those four roistering Double K bucks. They were down on the floor there somewhere, and, sitting quietly up here and sighting over the rail, he could easily enough pick them out.

The little town-hall gallery, with its uncompromising square corners, and heavy crossed beams that supported the roof, was unfinished, rude. But now there had been made a fine blithe effort to cover all this barrenness. Bunting streamed everywhere, hanging in prodigal tricolor loops on the walls, festooning the overhead beams and rafters. The low rail running across at front was smothered in it, the lamp brackets were mere fire traps. Parallel with the rail, some four or five rows of kitchen chairs had once been ranged in formal order. Tonight the lines wavered off into loose and friendly clumps.

At the stage of Drift's arrival in this coign of vantage, only a single spectator had as yet wandered up. It—a male—was an utterly oblivious and self-effacing Chinaman, intently crouched at front, on the extreme right side, away from the door.

Drift, dusting off a chair against damage to his perishable white toilet, seated himself at left, and, resting his elbows atop the rail, peered closely down into the seething well of sound and movement. Laughter, the high screech of fiddles, the scraping and pounding of heeled boots, the intermittent calling of quadrille figures—none of these things seemed to distract him. The steady blue eyes behind the clown's mask roved. Briefly he had fastened on his men.

"Hist!" he signaled, in a voice just sufficiently loud to carry, abetting it with a judiciously waved hand. "Lincoln! Ho, Six-finger! Come on up. Grab Do-si and Wing and French. Come on up."

The four punchers below—they were not dancing, but only turbulently weaving up and down the crowded floor—responded with a yowl of protest. Drift, however, kept on peremptorily waving. When he saw that the boys were going at last to succumb, he deserted the rail and strolled back as far as the gallery door to meet them.

Meantime, one small section of his brain was revolving a certain item. "That fellow in the brown hood and gunny-sack make-up downstairs, there—lancering in the same set with Jinny. A hell of a smart dancer, that lad was." Drift, leaned hard against the gallery door jamb, waited and wondered. "Who could it be?"

"Six-finger" Lincoln, "Do-si-do" Dippold, "Wing" Malone, and young "Frenchy" Duclas came hurtling up the stairs wtih a terrific clatter, and cast themselves through the narrow doorway. They were all masked, of course, and in fearful and arresting costume.

"What the bloody blazes you want, Drift?" flared Six-finger, the instant his outraged face was inside the door.

Drift took off his mask. "It's important. I had to chase you all together, so as to tell you——"

But in that modicum of time, Six-finger had espied the absorbed image of the Chinaman down by the rail at front. "Hey!" he yelled. "Well, holy petrified horned toads!"

"What's crawling onto you?" demanded Wing Malone. "Have you got the tremors?"

Six-finger could only unbelievingly point. "Look! Will you kindly tumble to that, down there?"

The other three Double K boys—all four with masks now torn off—joyously fixed the Chinaman in front with excited bright eyes. He, suddenly made aware by the noise, and feeling the cruel deviltry in the air, faced round, cringing with fright.

"Say!" apostrophized Six-finger. "*Am* I

drunk? Or is that——" But he was too overcome to finish.

Do-si-do murmured sympathetically. "Dear, dear! If some locoed shorthorn ain't been gone and copied up our brother's costume."

The Donegal matador began to whoop. "Where's a window? Bust out a window! Let's chuck him!"

It was Frenchy, though, that cropped up with the real inspiration. "Chuck 'eem? No, by gar! Not chuck 'eem. Le's drop 'eem ovaire de rail. Down eento de dance."

The chorus of charmed accord which greeted the subtle and happy suggestion fairly made the festoons of decorative tricolor to lift and swell on the walls.

"Sure, sure! The very trick!"

Without a blink of hesitation, they were launching into their rush across the gallery. But Drift resolutely stepped in, blocking the road.

"Here, you, sports!" he directed. "Just wait a minute. I didn't snake you up to play with no chink."

"Dat?" Frenchy clapped a huge white-gloved hand to his heart. "Ah, no, my frien'. Trus' me, dat ees no cheenk. Dat ees one dam fine masque, or I 'ave nevaire see 'eem!"

"Sure, it is!" corroborated Wing Malone.

Six-finger succinctly closed the discussion by shouting: "Who's got a rope?"

Disgusted, Drift slumped back into a chair and began to fish out tobacco and cigarette papers from under his clown suit. He was not in any actual or vital hurry, so long as he had the Double K boys safe in view. He knew when to make concessions. And his next dance with Jinny would not be till the fourth.

"Well, when you get clean done," he flung out to the roisterers, "remember I'm sitting here holding something up my sleeve for you."

Young Prosper Duclas—he was under nineteen—his grotesque minstrel-man coat tails flying, dashed out the door. Meantime, during the controversy, High-Low had stealthily slipped from his chair and was edging back along the far wall. The move must have been prompted by sheer panic, for the gallery had only the one exit and stairs, over here on the left. It was consequently a bad break for High-Low, as well as a hopeless, in that it gave the three punchers some color of excuse, if they had needed any, to descend on him like a bizarre avalanche.

"Oho!" yelped Six-finger. "You'd duck, hey?" He accompanied the reproach with a vicious twist at the neck of the poor Chinaman's blouse. "Defeat the ends of justice by ducking, hey, would you?" A violent shake.

"We'll teach you," promised Do-si-do, "to copy up an excloosive gent's costume at a respectable cow-town ball."

"And blame if she ain't pretty neat, too, boys."

"She sure is." Lincoln was tugging experimentally at High-Low's queue. "Say, on the dead, you can hardly tell this from real."

"How's he going down, Kansas?"

"He's going down in hobbles, tied to a chair, head first, his cane-seat moccasins a-waving in the breeze."

Do-si-do solemnly bent and extended his hand. "Lincoln, shake. I'm *proud* of a idea like that in you, old cimarron. I didn't guess she was there."

"Oh, you didnt, didn't you?" The complimented one was about to add on some suitable range rejoinder, but at that juncture Frenchy came smashing in with a coiled lariat.

"Yowie!" exulted the boy. "I nevaire ask oose rope she ees! But, by gar, she ees de fine, sof' elkskeen rope, you bet your back!"

The sight of those smooth, flexible coils of rawhide sent High-Low a sickly green. "Allee same stlaight chink!" he wailed. "Shootee biscuit Spling Hotel! Lookee—High-Low! Blingee cowboy good flied chicken. Falsee-face cowboy wantee good flied chicken? All light. To-mollow. High-Low tellee cook—heapee young flied chicken! Now falsee-face cowboy savvy High-Low?"

The four droll rioters paid no more heed to him than as if his shrill plaints had never caused vibration in the churned and dusty air.

"Here, boy," ordered Six-finger to French. "Gimme that rope."

High-Low, seeing at last the fruitlessness of all entreaty, resigned himself to the occasion with grave Oriental indifference. But it was Do-si-do that stepped suavely in between Lincoln and the held-out lariat.

"No, no, Six-finger. Not you. She'd never do for *you* to saw off the tying."

Stuttering with amazement, Mr. Lincoln hotly demanded: "Why the bloody blazes not?"

"Why, you're the aggrieved sport, Six-finger, don't you catch on? This here tying has got to be done by some rank, cold outside party. Somebody who wouldn't maybe accidentally yank a knot too tight, nor nothing like that. Don't you savvy no etiquette, Lincoln, at all?"

"Sure, sure!" chorused Frenchy and Wing.

"Besides," said Do-si-do, "I guess there ain't no argument I'm some the best tier here, at that." He reached to Frenchy for the rope. "I made a specialty of tying in college, I did."

In the wind of public opinion, Six-finger sourly acquiesced. "Well, then. Set the chink in a chair."

Do-si-do, who had carefully put aside monocle and cane and top hat, and rolled up his sleeves, was briskly opening the rope. "Come a-jumping, now, you veal-rustlers! Don't you hear what our old Kansas Abraham Lincoln lays down? Set the patient nicely in a chair." He indicated. "That comfortable, square-backed one, over there. That'll be about the very ticket."

With purring yells of delighted barbarism, the three snatched High-Low up and forced him into the assigned chair. Barely had the China boy's back touched the back of the seat before Do-si-do had him patly noosed to it. Then, with incredible swiftness and deftness, the bland fop threw half hitch after half hitch, here, there, and everywhere, till his victim was trussed like a bale.

Grudgingly, in spite of himself, Six-finger, scowling, had to nod. "Keen work. Pretty work. Only—blast your crook's soul—you buffaloed me out of it!"

Do-si-do was now busily knotting. "You prance around and herd in some other deserving shark who's a-modeling of his costume on Wing or French or me."

"Whoop-la!" sang out Mr. Malone. "How's this, fellows? For when we get finished up with the Mongolian tinhorn?"

"How's what?"

"Why, skin your eye at French, here. Don't he make the dandy nigger?"

Young Prosper Duclas wheeled suspiciously. "Well, what of eet, you Ireesh tank?"

Wing slung a hand upward. "And then get onto all these here nobby, fat, tempting beams. Going clean to waste."

"Ride to the point, Paddy," admonished Six-finger. "Ride to the point."

"Let's make out it's Texas, and string French up. Just while we got the rope. I'll come loping in and tell how he's insulted a white girl down the road——"

Prosper Duclas dragged out his ready .44. "By gar, I eensult you een de teeth weez de fron' sight of dees gun, een 'bout one meenute!"

Reflectively Six-finger considered Wing's proposal. "That ain't so bad, neither. Yes, I'll tie French, all right."

"Ah, you weell, weell you?" screamed the boy. "You weell lak 'ell!"

"You heard me, didn't you?"

The most fantastically impossible of minstrel-show negroes danced and flamed and flourished his ominous Colt. "Yass, I 'eard you! And I shoot up your dam face eento seex, too, lak your dam feengaire!"

"Now, don't go getting fussy, Johnnie," Wing advised. "Or maybe we *will* have to hog-tie you and hang you up a while."

Do-si-do, finishing with his knots, stepped back and regarded High-Low and the bewrapped chair. "H'm. I guess that's *that* sport, all bright and shining. We got to leave enough rope to drop him down by. Unless it's the vote of the round-up to cut him loose kerflop."

"No, sir," stated Six-finger emphatically. "It ain't the vote of the round-up none to cut him loose kerflop. He goes down easy, like I told you. I want to see his moccasins a-waving in the breeze."

"He's your meat, Abraham. Your whisper goes. Ketch hold, everybody."

Soulful Wing Malone found a way to supplement this. "Pallbearers, pallbearers! Ketch hold, pallbearers!" He was himself the first to seize a leg of High-Low's chair.

Frenchy, forgetting all about the recent strain, his menacing and facile gun thrust away, stooped almost with the bullfighter. "Down weez de traitaire, up weez de star!" So he chanted, that ingenuous child of Nature.

The other two took their corners, and, with one quick concerted heave, the chair shot to arm's length above their heads.

"Now, upside down!" vociferated Six-finger.

They shifted holds, and let the chair, still in that elevated position, topple suddenly and violently over forward, till it hung seat down, legs in the air. The trussed Chinaman, his throat torn by a single piercing shriek, sagged head downward against the secure turns of rope, his straw slippers

careering off, his long queue brushing the floor.

"Whoop-la! Let's see if we can pitch the corpus up till his feet touch the roof!" This was again, of course, the sympathetic Mr. Malone.

Six-finger briefly negatived the suggestion in words the range could understand. "Hump yourselves, now, you corn feds!" he commanded. "To the rail!"

The three took up the instructions in a lovely, protracted howl. "T-o t-h-e r-a-i-l!"

Bellowing and shuffling, they plunged with their lofty burden in the desired direction, the loose end of lariat trailing along over the boards behind them. As they neared the rail, they made such a din that even the musicians downstairs ceased playing, and the dance came to a full stop. Then, when the crowd below saw what was about to happen, a terrific answering salvo rattled up among the rafters.

High-Low, for his part, after the one involuntary screech, gave neither sign nor sound. None too gently, the four Double K deserters lowered him sharp away, still head downward, over the rail. Drift Weir, swathed in the voluminous black-and-white-and-red clown suit, remained in unmoved contemplation of an idle cigarette by the door at left.

"Freeze onto him, down there, will you?" Six-finger, jack-knifed, was weightily charging his audience over the rail. "Till we can break down."

Somebody on the dance floor, entering cheerfully into the spirit of the pastime, mentioned a procedure.

"Yes, sure!" acclaimed Do-si-do. "That's the trick! Put him up on the stage—sure! Then we'll stick our man up beside him and the judges can see which is the best chink."

With that, the four united in a headlong scrimmage over the rows of chairs for the gallery door. Drift, however, from his outpost, easily beat them to the goal and, when they arrived, it was only to meet this tall bulk and a pair of narrowed blue eyes bleakly facing them from under the rough lintel.

"I'm going," observed the utterly unclownlike Mr. Weir, "to say my speech right here and now. If I have to say it through the smoke."

The hurtling quartet reluctantly slowed down, spread out.

"Well, say ahead, blast it!" growled Six-finger. "Don't you spot we're busy?"

Drift made no try for florid oratory. "Hailton and Riggs take over the blue antelopes. Seven in the morning. Dakota drive, same as with Dave. I foreman the outfit. Do you join?"

"Huh!" But Six-finger was clearly sobered.

Do-si-do found and wiped his monocle. "Dave was going to bring us back."

"All Dave's contracts stand," Drift insured.

Six-finger turned on the three. "What you doing, sports?"

"I'm on," casually pronounced Do-si-do, tugging at his wrinkled sleeves.

"Sure t'eeng!" chimed Frenchy.

Wing debated with himself. "I dunno. Ain't she kind of bad luck to hook up again into a play like that? Where the deceased boss has just all frazzled up the start?"

"Yah!" grunted Do-si, still flicking and smoothing. "Get a job tending a apple cart, you old Irishwoman."

"My fists or gun say I'm the best galoot in *this* half-breed layout, just as quiet as you keep it!" retorted Mr. Malone.

"Excepting five or six. Sure we join, Drift. The Irish, too."

"Yes," judicially summed up Six-finger, "I guess we all go, fair enough."

"Then," the foreman nodded, "riding orders. At half past one we quit this cold. Break camp complete. By two we're hitting her up some lively along the West Valley."

Six-finger demurred on principle. "Shoo! The dooce we are."

"So," concluded Drift, "see to your ponies in plenty of time."

Do-si-do was now meticulously dusting himself. "That don't sound like much blankets, folks, does she? Where do we flop tomorrow night, Drift?"

"Up somewheres in the Agate. Maybe close in around the mouth of Two-Sleep Cañon."

The quartet, in its acutely varying voice-pitch, echoed this fortissimo. *"Two-Sleep Cañon?"*

Drift stared. "Any objections?"

"Right in the bosom of them regardless Staten lamb smackers!"

Wing Malone began to bawl. "Whoop-la! Hey, I'm all for this, I am. Gimme a good, blind, cursing old slam-bang fight, once again!"

"What you need," intimated Drift, "is—not another drink."

"Who," the flushed matador inquired, "says 'not another drink' to me?"

Drift modestly signified himself. "I do. And I say it long and loud."

"Don't say it to me," cautioned truculent Mr. Malone. "I don't allow no damned man to dictate to me. I take as many cursed drinks as I cursed please."

"Well, I ain't aiming to lop off your great American privileges, Wing. But we got a bunch of horses to work over into Dakota."

"I don't care," replied the Donegal one, "if we got a bunch of grizzly bears to work over into Dakota. I drink at a dance when I please."

Frenchy was gleefully hopping about the floor, clapping his white-gloved hands. "Da-ko-ta, Da-ko-ta! Ah, she sure smile at me, you bet you—dat plass!"

"How does she smile at you, boy?" asked Do-si-do curiously.

"*'Ow? 'Ow?* I use leeve een dat plass. I got de bes' leettle Swede girl een de worl' ovaire daire een Dakota! By gar, I wondaire eef she steell rastle roun' dat ol' town, Mandan?"

But this was squandering precious revolutions of the whirling spheres of night.

"All correct, Drift," guaranteed Six-finger. "We'll be hot with you, Two-Sleep Cañon, or hell's kitchen, or any other blasted thing on the suffering map! You just throw loose with a yell when you're ready."

The giant foreman stepped compliantly out of their way. "Good! And the rest of you ride herd on that liberty-loving Irish sot, there, so he don't get helpless."

"We will, we will."

"Oh, you will, hey?" This bull-wrangling Malone person was certainly an uncomfortable citizen. "Well, just watch you! I'll show you a caper or so you didn't know before, you poor tinhorn dance squaller!"

"What time's she now, Drift?"

"Climbing hard onto ten, I reckon."

Frenchy feverishly waved the others along. "Le's go, le's go! Eef we mus' vamose de ranch at 'alf pas' one—why, look—we 'ave not got lef' de beeg spell to dance een."

"Braid on your mask, then," reminded Do-si-do. Monocle and all, he was the first to be re-equipped. "Can't you whip yourself up some, Lincoln? You're nominated to match the chink on the stage, remember. Coming, Drift, old bucko? God, I hope Jonesy don't forget to give me that dance to call!"

CHAPTER X.

Drift still had minutes to kill before his waltz with Jinny. But, after that, a polka and a schottishe with her came in middling quick succession. What an adorable sensitive kid of a dancer she was! She made him seem like a bull buffalo floundering along beside her. Such sense of the music! And that abandon! She dropped the scarlet blanket off her when she danced, and the trig Ogallalla fawnskin conspired to give her something of the quality of a virginal and dainty wild antelope.

For appearance's sake, he then took a corner in a couple of square dances, choosing sets apart from Jinny's. Once he had Leah Robson for partner; a much-hooped and bewigged Colonial Dame. Next it was Mrs. Charlie Flood, who coyly personated a somewhat portly and ambling Queen of the May. He marked again, too, the unknown male in brown hood and monkish habit, never dancing directly with Jinny, and not actually hanging about her yet never very far away.

Drift, placid, strolled off by himself for another cigarette—and bumped into Lige Riggs. The shaggy junior Green Bow man had just slipped down to the hall for "a brace of shakes," to see how things were going with Jinny. Well, there the girl was, quite all right and manifestly enjoying herself. Also, Drift could give assurance of the rehiring of the four Double K punchers in the drive. Riggs was pleased. But—still he lingered on at the town hall. Evidently something was on his mind. At length it spurted out. With thick breathing, and the mottled patches of color coming and going on his unmasked face, and between clamped and tobacco-stained teeth—so he confided to Drift the whole incident of the catching of the Statens over at the wikiup in the morning.

A few moments later Drift happened to miss both Jinny and the brown cowl from the floor. A rapid, guarded search through the entire downstairs failed to bring any result. So the clown in his garish black and white and red quietly took to the upstairs.

Drift arrived in the open gallery doorway, and stood there, transfixed, unnoticed. Another pounding square dance was on down-

stairs, and the big bronchobuster could distinctly hear Do-si-do booming and drawling out the monotonous sequence of florid figures. But for him, Drift, so statuelike in the doorway, Jinny Hailton and the brown cowl would have had the flag-draped balcony absolutely to themselves.

"Then," the brown monk was persisting, "you won't let me come over to your wikiup?"

"No! Never!"

She swung on heel, only to meet Drift Weir hypnotically facing her in the doorway.

The instant she perceived him, though—that same instant made Drift a free man. Jinny, aghast, froze solid in her tracks. He, without a word said, strode swiftly past her, up to the brown monk. With the sure, economical, lightninglike movements learned in the bridling of many bad horses, the clown bronchobuster snatched off the other's mask, stripped back his cowl.

It was rough work, and Paul lashed out at him with both hands.

One of the blows caught Drift flush on the chin. He responded wickedly, a great, crushing clout on the mouth; and young Bernhardt pitched tumbling and rolling back among the gallery chairs. In a twinkling, however, he was on his feet—the uncowled monk; spitting blood and wildly fumbling inside his robe for his revolver. A sign of that, and Drift's own saving, big range six-shooter was in hand.

Both men had forgot all about Jinny by now. Paul, frantically groping, found his gun and whipped it out. The motion would undoubtedly have been his last. Only, like a flash, Jinny Hailton had darted in between the two combatants and flung herself on Paul's exposed breast, wrapping her arms about his shoulders.

There had not, during this, been a syllable spoken. And, for an interminable minute afterward, not another move of any sort was made in the gallery.

Then: *"Oh, Jinny!"* cried Drift.

That hulking baffled one, blindly shoving his six-shooter back inside his clown suit, spun round and felt for the door. A thin woman in the lower hall, happening to observe him staggering down the stairs, said to her companion with indignation: "It's a pity some men have no respect for anybody at a dance!"

CHAPTER XI.

Toward evening of that next day after the mask at Burnt Robe, the new Hailton and Riggs Dakota drive outfit was slowly working its five hundred head of blue roans along up the eastern side of the Agate. The fever of the day's early bustle had all died down, and everybody, including the nervous, watchful horses, dragged a bit. Five o'clock. At the dip of a dry wash several miles below Green Bow, foreman Drift Weir turned the band over to his second in charge, Albert G. Lincoln.

"I got to meet Alec and Lige up here across from the house," he explained to Six-finger. "You just let the cayuses nose along easy like this. Look out they don't make a lunge on you for the Green Bow meadow. That's all. I'll be back again before you strike Two-Sleep."

Drift's engagement to meet Hailton and Riggs up by the wikiup thicket didn't, as a matter of fact, fall due till sundown. The big black-and-gray buster, though, was careful to allow himself plenty of time. A solid half hour before the sun would touch the western rim of the mountain saw him jogging tirelessly up the quaking asp draw. He had a nonsensical rite he must go through with up there, alone. He wanted to say good-by to that flowery little, pointed shack he had known these past happy springs. Happy? Anyway, good-by. For next spring!

The least fraction slinking and shamefaced, Drift advanced on foot close to the smooth-stoned circle of yard, precisely as he had done yesterday. Then, as yesterday, he took off his hat, and gazed long and intently at the little withering shrine. At last an involuntary groan escaped him; a groan that tore its way up from the heart between unmanly quivering lips. After which, limply letting himself buckle at the knees, he flopped heavily down backward and sprawled his full-length, barbaric six-feet-two, on the ground along the yard border. An inquisitive magpie in an abutting cottonwood evidently thought all this extremely comic.

Gradually, from his back, Drift half twisted over to his side, ending by completely rolling onto his stomach and burying his face in his arms. For some minutes he lay outstretched in that frank paroxysm of wretchedness. But, even then, the automatic range senses within him did not cease alertly to function. Hearing a stir of movement,

faint and remote, in one noiseless twitch he was up on his goat-haired columns of legs, peering and listening.

Muffling clink of spurs and swish of chaps, quiet and wary as a ghost, he backed two strides to the south, which effectually put Jinny's little cone of witchery, as a screen, between himself and the newcomer. Drift, that is, was skirting the down-draw arc of the circular courtyard: the other approached from up the draw.

No amount of being on his guard could have made Paul Bernhardt an observant man. He simply had not been built in such fashion. So he failed utterly to sight Drift in the latter's rapid crouching shift round the bower. Thoughtfully he bore near to the wikiup stones. After a moment, Drift stepped sideways into view.

It was sudden—anybody might have been startled. Jumping back, Paul Bernhardt, however, addressed himself to the emergency like a frontiersman. A snatch at his hip pocket, and he had again jerked out the .38 caliber revolver of last night. He threw it down on Drift without a breath of hesitation. But, as the other made no answering sign toward his own gun, Paul, after a few seconds of embarrassed uncertainty, let his extended hand and arm reluctantly fall.

"That's right," approved Drift. "Best talk. You're expected here, I reckon."

Paul replied: "I don't know anybody that expects me. Unless, perhaps, you do."

"Well, now you mention it," said Drift, "maybe I did want to run onto you. But I'm expecting somebody else, too. So we'd better be quick."

"The quicker the better, as far as I'm concerned," young Bernhardt agreed:

Drift eyed the representative of the sheep ranches evenly. There was that about Paul —you couldn't despise him. "Jinny Hailton," began the troubled giant, and paused.

Then he wetted his lips and tried again, more resolutely. "You savvy, of course, that for you to marry Jinny Hailton won't be no velvet pastime. You'll have to do it mighty prompt, and mighty deep under cover. And then you'll have to clear out of this country hotter than a man and woman ever hiked before. Jinny'd be a widow in about one hour."

"Why, you've got everything arranged to a hair, haven't you?" sneered Paul.

The blond foreman continued: "This is sure playing it pretty low-down on Alec and Lige. In me. But I know Jinny Hailton when she's set her heart on a thing. She don't balk at no trifles, and now ain't exactly the time for protracted courtships in this valley."

"My dear sir," and Paul smiled. "I don't like to interfere with your fancies. I'm given to fancies myself. That's why I'm here now. But you're really going it a shade strong. You are, really. You're on the wrong track altogether."

"Am I?" Drift's tenor voice had its wickedest bleak inflection. "I hope I ain't. Do you happen to mean by that——"

"I happen to mean simply that you're making a crazy and—pardon me—laughable mistake."

The tall bronchobuster wrinkled his open brow. You couldn't string along asking this jeering young sport solemn questions forever.

"Listen, you!" he stated, brusquely circling the wikiup yard and coming near to Paul. "You ain't never been up against a man like me yet. I'm as dead cruel to your sort as a bobcat is to cottontails."

"I can well appreciate it," murmured Paul.

"And I'm a free hand," the other went on. "Out-and-out free and unhobbled, I am. I've always kept myself tolerable free and on deck, in case Jinny Hailton might—might care—to lift an eyelash. But I reckon that card falls to you."

"A fatalist, eh, are you?"

"I can win or lose. Only, in this clutter, though I drop out of the playing, I still hang on to overlook the game."

Paul treated him to another of the skeptical, irritating smiles. "Which is to say that——"

"I'm a free hand," patiently reiterated Drift. "Free to ramble where I please. I figure you'll be taking Jinny Hailton along back East. All right. I've always wanted to see them big Eastern hoss-racing plants. So I might just come curving in on the edges of your bailiwick, now and then. If Alec or Lige don't get you."

"You certainly paint an alluring picture of it. For a timid and backward bridegroom!"

Drift bent his bronzed face to within six inches of the cynical face. "You don't believe these things I'm telling you?"

"I believe them. But if you could only manage to point out some earthly human reason——"

"There sure ain't no hole in hell!" promised the savage wrangler. Then, his sensitive ear picking up an interruption, he glanced round the wikiup down the draw. "Here's Alec and Lige now."

Young Bernhardt swore. He frowned and fidgeted restively. "I do seem to be making a ghastly hash of this!"

"Where's your hoss?"

Paul shrugged a shoulder up the draw. "I left her three-quarters of a mile over across the hill."

"You're all O. K., then," pronounced Drift. "Just duck straight up the way you came. There ain't enough trees to plug for much, but you got a good, clean break, and by crawling flat down on your belly, and waiting for the dark——" He stooped and started up toward the butte. "Hello! You don't seem out of luck. Here's Wagonwheel Sims coming slap over the ridge with a bunch of cows."

Bernhardt also stooped and stared. "Oh, nice, nice!" he muttered.

The eyes of both men searched rapidly all round about for a hiding place. Literally nothing worth while offered. The draw, smooth and bare and gravelly except for the thin line of slender trees, would scarce have sheltered a badger, aboveground. In spite of his nonchalant irony, Paul began to cower. No matter which direction he looked, his eyes would always return desperately to the wikiup. At last he had to speak.

"In a life-and-death toss-up like this——" he hinted to Drift, subtly, in a very low voice. Then he nodded with unmistakable eagerness toward the little withering lodge. "Don't you—don't you think——"

"What!" exclaimed the giant foreman. "*In there?*"

"It's a question of life and death!" young Bernhardt vehemently urged. "A helpless man—his life, death?"

Drift shook a grim head. "No, sir. Not in there."

Paul watched Hailton and Riggs, armed with their Winchesters, jogging up the draw from the west, and then swung and watched Wagonwheel Sims, also carrying a Winchester, rattling down his bunch of scary range cattle from the east. They were closing in on him fast. Paul was only twenty-four—twenty-four! He didn't want to die.

With outstretched hands he appealed starkly to Drift. "Don't you think—that if Miss Hailton herself were here——"

The potentialities of this argument struck Drift hard, villainously. He swallowed, torturedly wiping his mouth. "You're telling me—that—that Jinny herself—she—you're telling me—*she'd* let you——"

No, Paul did not want to die! "If she were here—yes—judging from what happened last night—yes, yes—don't you think—can you doubt—she'd be the *one* to suggest——"

Drift measured the distance off to Hailton and Riggs with his eye. He had suddenly gone very leg-weary, very sick.

"Yes," he slowly assented to young Bernhardt. "I reckon you're right. If she was here—yes, I reckon she'd sure say——"

Paul sprang with alacrity for the wikiup yard. Fortunately, in her building of the little woodsy tepee, Jinny had superstitiously opened it to the east, up the draw. Luck! Paul stooped and sprang for that low-arched entrance.

Only, before he could cross the boundary stones, Jinny Hailton herself, on hands and knees, emerged hastily through the hole in the leafy wall. She had been in there, then, all the while! Paul Bernhardt stilled, turned to ice.

"Great God Almighty!" whispered Drift. He recovered and thrust sharp for his horse. "I'll chase out and slow Alec and Lige down," he called in an undertone to Jinny.

CHAPTER XII.

In the quaking-asp thicket, inside the wikiup yard, Jinny had scrambled violently to her feet. She was wearing again to-day the square-necked garnet dress. But her face was not again the play-camp builder's face of yesterday. From beyond the boundary stones, Paul Bernhardt incoherently stammered:

"I just came over this afternoon—I *had* to come—to see if I couldn't—say or do something——"

Jinny, mute, shook her head.

"Good God!" breathed Paul. "It seems a little thing to ask. You were willing to do so infinitely much more for me last night." He stared unbelievingly at the wikiup. "Is it so sacred, that?"

Jinny spoke. "You wouldn't understand. It's all I've got. It's the way I look at it."

"But—to save a man's life! A man who's crazily risked his very life——"

She nodded. "I know. I'm sorry. But I can't go on doing everything."

Steadying, Paul regained somewhat of his natural salt of irony. "Ah, well!" he exclaimed, with his shrug. "It's probably more decent to die by a bullet, anyway. Rather than by Bright's disease or cancer, eh?"

Jinny shudderingly stepped outside the yard. "Go in!" she cried. "Go in!"

In the hysterical intensity of his relief, young Bernhardt could barely contain himself. "Thanks, little friend! Unimaginable thanks!"

He turned himself this second time for the leap across to safety. But, again, before he could spring, Jinny had darted out her arm and stopped him. "No, no!" she sobbed. "I can't bear it!"

If there had not been the utter necessity of keeping his voice down, Paul Bernhardt must have screamed.

Hailton and Riggs were now so close that, in another couple of minutes, they would be able to see in under the trees.

"Lie down!" Jinny commanded Paul. "Just where you are! I'll cover you!"

Fleet as she was, Paul had already obeyed her instructions. Even, he had found a tiny hollow in the ground to flatten into, and this helped. Jinny carefully scattered her twigs and small boughs over him, and returned inside the wikiup for more. Keeping herself strictly screened from her father and Riggs, who were considerably nearer than Wagonwheel Sims—she must take her chance with Wagonwheel, who, however, was mighty busy with his skittish cattle—keeping her doll's house always scrupulously between herself and her father and uncle, Jinny continued to heap the boughs over Paul. When she had used the last of her inside stock, she ruthlessly tore out still other greenery from the wikiup walls; flowers, grasses, everything. By the moment she absolutely must desist, Paul had been pretty well mounded up.

"Don't stir!" she whispered curtly. "If they happen to notice this, they'll think it just a pile of stuff I had left over."

Drift was earnestly engaging the Green Bow partners in talk. He had beyond question slowed down their pace, as well as contrived to hold their eyes and ears mostly on himself. When the three men rode into the grove, Jinny was sitting hunched up in front of the down-draw aspect of her bower, watching them. Wagonwheel Sims duly went clattering by with his cattle on the outside.

The big black-and-gray bronchobuster reined Kelly back, but Hailton and Riggs walked their horses silently on toward the circular courtyard. Paul was directly opposite them, the wikiup intervening. When they had come to a halt, Alec Hailton, without speaking, somberly and fixedly regarded his daughter from the saddle.

"Drift told us you were here," he brought out at length. "Honest, Jinny. Lige and I are clean up in the air about you."

Huddled on the ground, the girl buried her face deep in arms and knees.

Very gently, Riggs said: "Didn't we 'specially ask you to stick around close to the house this afternoon, honey?"

Jinny remained unansweringly and miserably bent over her knees. Hailton remonstrated against her muteness.

"But listen, now, Jinny. Here am I, going off with these horses for three or four or five weeks, maybe six. And Lige and the boys with all the heavy spring work opening up wide on them. You know what this means. And you know the pinch we're in. Yet, you don't seem to be able—or to want to—you don't seem to be able to do a bit toward your share."

With her face still sunk in arms and knees, Jinny began convulsively to rock from side to side. "Oh, daddy, daddy!" she sobbed. "Why did you go away and leave me this afternoon?"

Hailton, astounded, could only blankly repeat: "Why—why did we go away——"

"And leave you, honey?" huskily thrilled Riggs.

Jinny, without raising her head, vehemently nodded to and fro, many times, her whole lithe, young body shaking with the sobs. "Yes, yes, yes! I was never so lonely in my life before!"

The Green Bow partners swung from their saddles as if moved by a single spring. Hailton tossed Riggs his rifle. Some yards behind the elder men, Drift Weir hovered, mounted, constrainedly half pointing Kelly down the draw.

"Why, come, now, my little Jinny!" called Hailton, spreading his arms. "Come to me, come to your daddy! Quick! What is it, darling?"

The girl bounded up and ran wildly outside to him, casting herself with the terrified abandon of a child into his extended arms.

Tenderly he caressed and comforted her, murmuring: "What is it, my little Virginia? What is it, darling? What makes you so unhappy to-day?"

Strongly crushed to her father's breast, Jinny began to quiet. "I didn't want you to go away and leave me—that's all. These old Dakota ponies."

"But it's all over and done with now, honey," reassuringly declared Riggs.

Hailton abruptly turned his head to his partner. "Lige, this settles it. She shall go into town for a month or so."

"No, no, daddy!" With a quiver of excitement, the girl, waking to crises outside herself, straightened sharply in her father's arms. "What have you two been up to, with your guns, that you're hiding from me?"

"Up to?" marveled Riggs ingenuously, gazing at the two rifles in his hands as if he had never seen them before.

"What, daddy?"

"We've been up cutting the Two-Sleep fence."

Involuntarily, Drift scraped Kelly with his rowels. The bay pony shot forward, only to be instantly checked. But that short-jump start had pushed the cowboy far enough over to the side for his restless eye to mark down the little heap of dried aspen branches behind the wikiup. Had that mound been there before? Drift tried hard to remember. No, blamed if he thought it had!

Jinny Hailton, meantime, was staring, fascinated, from her father to the beaming ex-watchmaker and back. "Ah-h-h!" her cold lips formed, though no sound came.

She scarcely recognized the two ranchmen. Of a sudden they had become like boys on a lark. With profound and naïve glee, Riggs produced a pair of heavy wire-cutting pliers from his pocket.

"Oh, Jinny!" he exulted. "If you'd only just been there to see us! The way we sure went through that brand-new fence!"

The girl reached round to her father's hip pocket and dragged out his pliers. In this moment of reaction, after the months of hatred and brooding, Hailton was quite as irresponsible and gay as Riggs. His fine chin lifted with laughter.

Jinny, who had so recently been child, now seemed all but motherly beside the two riotously broken-loose men. "Who was with you?" she demanded. "Who helped?"

Hailton definitely explained. "It was our job. We had no business letting anybody else get mixed up in it."

"It's a wonder they didn't rush you. Just you two!"

"They didn't have the nerve. They're sheep people, Jinny. Anyway, we could always have ducked back into the cañon and stood them off. And we waited till Drift was up handy, too, with the horse herd and his extra boys. We've got twelve able-bodied men on deck here to-night."

Riggs spun round toward Drift. "You're the follow-up laddybuck that'll have to be on the lookout for trouble, though—hey, son?"

With an effort, Drift pried his eyes away from the wikiup and that mysterious elongated little mound of dried greenery behind it. "I reckon she won't do no harm to be kind of trimmed and ready to-night," he admitted, with a flitting wraith of grin.

Hailton patted Jinny's shoulder, took his pliers from her and released her from his arms. "Now, we must go." He addressed himself specifically to Drift. "The band ought to be in sight, from what you report. Lige, Jinny, Dixie, Old Kit and I'll hold it while you and the boys ride over to the house for supper. Then the camp wagon'll trail you right out. Jinny, where's your horse?"

"I didn't bring any. I came afoot."

"Well, you can climb up on Gabe with me, as far as the creek."

The Green Bow trio mounted the two horses, Jinny squeezing in sidewise on the saddle up in front of her father, her knee hooked over the pommel. Girl, man, and pony were all plentifully uncomfortable, but they would make out for the distance.

"Go ahead," signaled Drift, waving the party on down the draw. He himself briskly dismounted and steered over toward the north edge of the thicket. "Be right with you. I got to catch a drink."

The others rode off. Drift struck across as if for the tiny rill of water which, trickling to a point just here, vaguely seeped away into the ground and was lost. He seemed bound for the drink, proper enough. But when Hailton, Riggs, and Jinny had cleared the trees and were a few steps launched down the draw, he switched and strode obliquely back to the little pile of aspen branches behind the wikiup.

Carefully, with the dusty toe of his boot, he swept the crackling-leaved brush aside.

"Huh!" he grunted thoughtfully.

Then, without a further glance, he pushed for his tired bay pony and jogged off after the others toward the westerly creek.

CHAPTER XIII.

There was no intention of passing the five hundred blue roans back through narrow, rocky Two-Sleep Cañon into the shallow side basin beyond. That would have been troublesome on more than one score. The horses, as a matter of fact, never got within half a mile of the mouth of the cañon. It was thought better to keep them clear away out in the open.

With two full wrangler crews to draw on for to-night, the dancing Double K boys had at last a chance for a touch of "blankets." All, that is, except the foreman, who had never been a Double K.

Drift insisted he wasn't tired, and, after supper, gravely and phlegmatically took his place again in active charge of the band.

In order not to make the night too hard for the regular home outfit, which would have its own sufficient cattle work to-morrow, the two crews had to be shifted about a bit, in watches. Flannen Lloyd, however, took the saddle band for all night, and Riggs the chuck wagon. This pair, with Drift, remained on duty straight through. The others came and went.

Hailton slept at the ranch house. He didn't like to think of Jinny's being there quite alone till morning, especially after her queer behavior in the thicket this afternoon; and, moreover, he would have a long trick of it himself to-morrow, what with cooking and driving the camp wagon. For such was to be his owner's job.

To-night the wagon, in Elijah Riggs' care, rested in a snug bend of the creek some trifle less than three miles above the Green Bow house. Lige unharnessed and turned his horses out in Flannen's saddle band, built a fire, and promptly set up range headquarters, finding plenty to do.

It was a sweet little spot for a camp. The fragrant, subtly disturbing spring night swept by here almost without a sound. At two o'clock, Riggs called the four boys who lay profoundly sleeping in their spread-out beds just beyond the rim of fire shine. They were the new-hired drive wranglers, Six-finger Lincoln, Do-si-do Dippold, Wing Malone and young Frenchy Duclas; and this call was for breakfast and the beginning of the day's grind.

After the boys had eaten, enormously and rapidly, though still only half awake, at the canvas-covered wagon, they fell heavily back on their beds to finish dressing. The fire flicker vaulted and dwindled, playing ever and anon on some loose, unkempt figure, inscrutably edging with stencil of red gold some uncouth sprawl of saddlery or tumbled blankets. Riggs, stalking grotesque through the shadow between fire and wagon, was now busily engaged in cooking breakfast for Drift and the incoming watch of Green Bow men. Hung from the footboard of the wagon, a dim lantern burned, steady.

Expertly Do-si-do caught the flicker of fire shine on his tiny round of mirror and raked with the comb at his lanky hair. "She's like this, Irish. I got a man's-size appetite, Wing. One of them smiling, wide-open, frying-pan brands of appetites, plumb liable to temptation. Maybe you notice? Anyway, I admit the corn, free and ungrudging."

"What is this? A *book* you're talkin'?" asked Wing Malone.

Do-si-do blandly raked on at his intractable hair. "Therefore, knowing my table shortcomings that way as I do, Paddy, I say again, that if Alec keeps this here present lick up all the canter across, I'll go surging into Dakota dead shy on my shape."

Fastidious Mr. Dippold had by now finished with his hair and mustache, and put the toilet articles away. All four punchers were seated on their respective beds, pulling at boots and chaps, buckling belts and spurs and gauntlets, tying handkerchiefs about their necks, and so on.

"Say, Seex-feengaire," Frenchy propounded. "What ees de mattaire weez ol' Drift, anyway?"

"Matter? I don't see much the matter. He's as live as rattlesnakes, Drift is. As far as I can make out."

"But—look—seence de dance! 'E ees not tak de one weenk of sleep een two 'ole night!"

"Well," sardonically suggested Lincoln. "You was out wrangling with him last evening, wasn't you? Why didn't you brace him?"

"Brace 'eem?" Prosper Duclas grimaced expressively. "No, saire. I deed not *'ave* to brace 'eem. I keep de eye on 'eem." The

boy laid a large caressing hand over his own heart. "Eet ees een 'ere."

Over by the chuck wagon, Riggs, with a skillet in his hand, lifted sharply. "Listen!" he sang out. "What's that?"

Faint and far away, there was the sound of several shots. The cowboys hearkened with straining ears. Almost instantly, the remote shots began to crackle in volleys.

"God!" murmured Do-si-do.

But it was Riggs who spoke the precise word. "They're rushing Drift," Lige said with that formidable lack of emphasis of his. "They're rushing the band."

As he rode out to his band from Green Bow this late May evening, through the wild-grass meadow and over the pungent flats of sage, the heart in Drift's bulky arched chest beat rather light and high. He had not been alone with Jinny Hailton, they had exchanged neither word nor sign. Merely, the picture of a flashily dressed young pilgrim lying ignominious and prone on the common ground of the quaking-asp thicket, dirtied with a litter of brown, dry leaves and twigs and boughs—that picture would somehow pleasantly persist. Inner eyes didn't have to be very wide open to see it, and Drift looked his fill.

Not, though, that he really let anything get between him and the night's wrangle. Irruption, riot, developments of the hottest sort, might be expected here without an instant's warning. He realized it only too acutely. And he was used to crushing his sentiments sharp up in hand. So no rosy-tinted lover's pastel of the brain caused him, as drive boss, to neglect his antelopes.

Midnight came and went. Though the sky didn't clear at daybreak, the disturbing promise of rain gradually faded out of the inky air. The horses let up in their incessant snorting, their troubled weaving to and fro, round and about. An encouraging minority of them took quietly to cropping the grass.

The subtle crisis in the foreman's interminable night seemed past. Drift sat back against the cantle of his saddle and rolled a cigarette. Half an hour more now, and Six-finger and the boys would be loping out to relieve him. Their hurtling yell of "Grub pile!" would make a cheerful sound in his ears, too. All the same, it was no part of the business of this outfit to relax the fraction of a notch on the vigilance.

Well scattered, the horses were, at the present stage; and Drift had his quartet of Green Bow men flung out in an ample nursing circle about them. He himself moved slowly round from point to point; rarely hanging very long in any one spot; noting every slightest change in the complexion and tang of the situation; building up, as it were, almost by the power of his mind, a sort of palpable binding corral.

So there came a given measure in the span of the night when he was in this fashion shacking along the northern edge of the herd. He had just quitted "Dixie" Lewis.

Over in the east, then, starting as an incredible and fiery stab in the impenetrable abyss of black, a gunshot rang out.

Drift twisted Jonah fairly on to his side, and, in one second, under quirt and spur, the grizzled, stocky pony was doing his best in the direction of the flash. Through the intense silence which succeeded this shot, Drift could also plainly hear Dixie pounding close behind him. But before he had covered the first hundred feet of his sprint, a dozen more shots had spouted out into the eastern night. After that, they snapped and boomed and rattled thick and fast.

"Hey!" muttered Drift, under his breath. "All right, sheep! Come a-running!"

And, very evidently, the Staten gang was coming. Out of the hills, there, from the east—out they charged; at least ten or fifteen riders of them, and now all shooting. Noisy big-caliber guns they had; shotguns, some must have been; and, besides these, go-devil cans. Which is to say, large, square elaine-oil tins, reasonably provided with pebbles and dragged over the rough ground at the end of a rope.

No voices, not a whoop, not an order, not a call! Only the loud shooting, the metallic unsteady crashing and banging of the madly dragged oil cans! For the antelopes, it was enough. Half as much would have served. Delirium seized the five hundred, panic.

Drift carried a Winchester and six-shooter, as did each of his men. But he hadn't yet won anywhere near the raiders when he perceived that their trick had been turned. Mrs. Barrensen's band of wild blue roans was cleanly and hopelessly stampeded. Old Kit Carson, to the south, and Wagonwheel Sims, on the east, stood about as much chance of checking them—not to mention *stopping* them—as a couple of tall sagebushes would stand!

No, the trick had been very prettily turned. One could always fight, of course. But it would now save nothing, so far as the horses were concerned. As Drift frankly told himself such unwelcome truth, a bullet whistled shrill above his ear.

Still letting Jonah tear evenly along, but not from this time on thinking of heading off anybody, the weary drive boss set Winchester to hip and began giving his exclusive and systematic attention to the gun flashes. If Louie Lilyard happened to be somewhere over there, and he downed the poor Swede boy—well, it was all in the night's work. You took the same odds yourself.

Side by side with the racing raiders, then, raced impassive big George Decker Weir, all in the dust of the furiously careering horse band, shooting and loading, shooting and loading and shooting again. He could see or hear no actual definite thing now.

But more murky flashes spurted out. Drift seemed to feel a vivid streak of red sear across his eyeballs.

Here! Hold on! Wait! Something was wrong.

Then an unyielding substance butted horridly into him.

What could that be? Wait—wait! Just let him catch his breath, just let him pull himself together. Why couldn't they just let him pick himself up? Wait! *Damn* them! Ah-h-h-——

After which befell a space of beautiful and complete quietude.

CHAPTER XIV.

At the camp wagon, Wing Malone was now arraigning Destiny in good earnest.

"Fighting, fighting, fighting!" he sobbed. "And they wouldn't send me out—they wouldn't send me!" He was whirling about arms tossed in the air. The man had literally burst into honest, heart-burning tears!

Six-finger, beside himself, could only impotently curse.

"Oh, 'i-yi-yi!" marveled Frenchy. "Jus' 'ear dose pony 'eet de groun'!"

"They've gone straight out of their minds!" said Do-si-do. "Yes, sir, sheep and all, they've sure gone straight out of their minds!"

"And us loafing in here—with full bellies!" Six-finger raged at his hapless hair. "Where the blasted nation is Flannen?"

"Listen!" commanded Riggs. "They're coming this way."

The remote shots, suddenly grown appallingly louder, zipped out in uninterrupted spattering strings. Under the hammering hoofs of the five hundred stampeded horses, the valley began to rock, the low sky to reverberate with a dull thunder. As the quintet of straining men by the camp fire hearkened, shots and rumble drew steadily nearer.

"Dead this way!" shouted Six-finger. "They *are!*"

Six-finger bounced for his saddle. "Grab your rifles, everybody. We might have to blaze into 'em!"

All except Riggs seized Winchesters. The thunder of hoofs approached terribly. Five aching pairs of eyes tried in vain to probe that ominous surrounding wall of black.

"Oh!" complained Do-si-do. "If you could only anyway spot one sheep-herder!"

"No, no!" Riggs motioned peremptorily. "Don't shoot. Except to swerve the band. You'd drop some of our boys, certain."

It was at this moment that Alec Hailton came fiercely loping from the south into the circle of fire shine. He had somehow not been able to rest very well in his bed at the ranch, and had got up and saddled, and started out alone for the wagon, just in the nick of time to run into Staten's rush. The five standing men switched and silently greeted him, then peered hurriedly back into the pregnant northeast.

"There, there!" Six-finger pointed. "That's Flannen shooting now, ain't it?"

"Yes! Yowie! They've caught him!"

"Oh, we're afoot, all right! We're sure afoot!"

Hailton spoke for the first time. "And every horse at the ranch ranging out, too. Except my Gabe, here."

Do-si-do shrugged. "To hell-and-gone, then, every last one of 'em! There won't be a jack rabbit left for miles."

"French, you young coyote, you!" besought Six-finger. "You got the best eyes. Can't you see nothing?"

"I t'eenk dey bust up ol' Flannen, good and plenty, you bet your back!"

"Hey, they're sheering off!" sang out Do-si. "Ain't they? Sure! They ain't headed this way any more."

"Then Flannen turned 'em. Yes, that was bully old Flannen turned 'em. They're breaking down the creek."

Wing Malone swore huskily. "By the Eternal! You four-flushers can do what you please. I'm going out and see if they got Flannen."

"Come on, then," said Six-finger.

The daunting thunder of hoofs swept by a short distance to the east. All shooting had now entirely died out. Awkwardly on foot, the saddle-accoutered Double K boys lunged off together into the feverish night.

"Well, Lige," observed Hailton, from his horse.

Riggs, who had been extraordinarily self-contained while the boys were here, tossed up his arms in the wildest and most importunate manner of Wing Malone. "War!" he choked. "War—war—war!"

"War it is!" echoed Hailton. "To the knife. But our boys—I wonder if any of them are down?"

"Let's go! That's all! Let's slam out and get into it!"

"I'm with you, brother. You understand?—if anything happens to either of us, the other must look first to Jinny——"

"Don't let me think of Jinny now! If we're men, revenge is the one and only job we'll think of! Blood!"

"Lige! Remember! You'll do better work if you keep icy cold. It won't be long, now, till there's a blink of light."

"The fighting, the fighting!" mumbled Elijah Riggs. His large round, silver-rimmed spectacles caught the fire shine and glittered, sinister. "At last! It's begun!" He jumped back and snatched his Winchester from the wagon.

"I'll push ahead," said Hailton, spurring off.

Short and shaggy, the ex-watchmaker followed him away on foot at astonishing speed.

What had Jinny Hailton's pretty quaking-asp thicket in the hills to do with horse rushes?

Obviously, nothing. Still, the draw was considerably nearer to the scene of stampede than was Green Bow ranch house. The roans had swerved this way.

So, just as the profoundly dense and soft gloom of that May night of turbulence was giving place to a hint of cold and elusive pallor in the air, a pervasion not yet dawn, two ponies, curiously bound together at the heads, bridle to bridle, plodded sleepily side by side out of the main valley and up the draw toward Miss Jinny's leafy retreat.

The taller of the pair of cayuses was Hailton's Gabe, a raw-boned gray, almost white. The shorter might too, perhaps, have been called a gray; a kind of nondescript grizzle, clumpy, round; with a small, wise, dark eye inclining toward the sulky; of some nomadic Sioux stock. This one answered to the rather unsympathetic name of Jonah. Each pony bore a rider, and, of course, in deference to the natural perversity of things, the taller man would be on the shorter steed.

But the big rider atop of Jonah didn't seem to be hanging on very keenly of his own volition. Alec Hailton, in the saddle opposite, gave the utmost of what friendly support he could to that limp and swaying figure, which was garbed in a neutral canvas coat, a splotched flannel shirt, and dusty black Angora chaps. With care, with infinite pains, Alec strove to prop his slack companion against the journey's inevitable jolts, rallying and scolding the man, berating the awkwardly lashed-together ponies, finding himself alternately crushed or stretched as these twain banged into one another or slued wide apart, yet somehow patiently getting through with the difficult and delicate task.

Soon they were among the rustling parked trees, exquisite and mysterious in this pristine foreshadowing of the day. Hailton dismounted and eased his toppling burden from the other saddle to the ground.

"Lean more on me, Drift. Why don't you *lean* on me, man?"

"Holy suffering, Alec!" muttered the limber giant. "I'm all right."

"You certainly act as if you were all right."

"Well, a little crease along the wishbone. I ain't denying I'm scratched, am I? But you talk like I was really hurt."

"You've lost about a hatful of gore, from the cake on your shirt."

"Shoo! If you stick yourself with a pin, she bleeds some. And I reckon I'm thick-blooded."

The Green Bow man humored him. "Yes, I suppose you are. And if you think your lung's not been touched——"

"Great Lord, no! The bullet only hit a rib and glanced off. It's *outside*."

"Then—I'm satisfied. We'll be all hunky-dory. I'll leave you here and hit back with your pony for Lige."

"Sure, sure!"

"It's coming on light now——"

"Chase yourself smart along, Alec. Hey, just let me camp down against the butt of this tree."

He had been making a shift at keeping on his legs, but now Hailton gently lowered him away to the ground, so that he sat on the dry gravel with his back to the slim, pale trunk of one of the aspens.

The ranchman surveyed him, almost unbelievingly. "That wonderful old rip of a pony!" he exclaimed. "I can't get over him. We'd never have stumbled on you if it hadn't been for him."

Drift groaned. "Yep. He's a prime old Injun skate, Jonah is."

"But to stand stone-still—fair above you—just where you pitched off! In a whirlwind rush like that!"

The effort of getting himself fixed extorted another whistling groan from Drift. "He's pulled me out of a hole or two, before now."

"Here," said Hailton. "It's mighty cool, in this first dawn." He took off his blanket coat and wrapped it about Drift.

"Suffering steamboat!" weakly protested the bronchobuster.

"Let it be. Now, I'm off." The Green Bow man strode a rapid yard or so toward the horses, then returned. "How's your six-shooter?"

"How?" Vaguely, without moving his upper arms, Drift felt about with his hands. "Gone, I reckon."

"Well, you're dead safe here, for the pinch. The boys are all around. And I'll be back inside of—maybe half an hour. With some news, I hope."

"Fine! Don't crowd yourself none on my account, Alec."

"You just manage to bull it through alone these next few minutes. That's all. Then we'll see what attention you really need."

Unlashing the horses' bridles, Hailton mounted Gabe and led Jonah behind him down the draw, trotting five or six steps, then snapping into a hard lope.

Drift, left to his own devices, tried to settle himself a little lower and more comfortably against the tree. His teeth chattered in the silent chill, and he snuggled his back gratefully into Alec's enveloping coat. An inexpressibly filmy and ethereal pink flush began to filter into the eastern sky, swiftly deepening and expanding, till it became a vivid high ruddiness.

Drift's head would persist in sinking heavily forward. He straightened with a groaning jerk. Again, uncontrollably, the head drooped. Time after time, with suppressed oaths and groaning, he straightened and stiffened. Only, time after time, to lapse inevitably forward once more. Then, at last, completely losing consciousness, he slipped clear away from the tree trunk and fell sidewise full length along the ground.

Momentarily, thin pearly brightness increased and intensified in the sky.

CHAPTER XV.

To Jinny herself had often fallen the before-breakfast task of rounding up and bringing in the day's horse supply. It was a job she liked. She knew the ponies' favorite foothill haunts. And she knew, moreover, for the present crisis, that if she could just come upon her own Trix, she would be able to catch the black mare afoot; after which, bareback, she could proceed to drive the rest of the bunch home to their regular corral. So, taking her hackamore and a couple of lumps of sugar wrapped up in her handkerchief, she briskly set off, as day was flaming, due east across the creek.

Only, she could never point in this general hill direction—not now, especially—without having a little glimpse in at her wikiup. And the very foremost thing her darting eyes fastened on this morning, naturally—before she had so much as glanced at the drying cone of wikiup itself—was the prostrate figure of a man flung out beside one of the slender trees.

"Oh!" she breathed, stopping short, both hands flying to her breast.

The man didn't stir.

She half pulled the muffling outer coat from about him, jumping wildly back at the sight of the blood underneath. For a brief space she stood tense above, hands again to her tumultuous breast, not knowing what to do. Then, getting hold of herself, she crouched resolutely down.

"Oh, Drift! You're not dead, are you? Oh, no! You're just hurt. You've just fainted, haven't you? Oh, how did you ever get here? Look at me, Drift! Open your eyes! It's Jinny. Oh, Drift, Drift—*look* at me!"

His dun canvas coat was all unbuttoned. Jinny suddenly brushed back the yellowish hair from his brow, touched the skin with her palm, boldly laid a hand on the discolored splotch of shirt over his heart. Then,

like a flash, she was up, snatching his hat from the ground and racing with it toward the rill of water on the north edge of the thicket. When she got back with the dripping hatful, she knelt again beside the prone bronchobuster and began to dash the icy water into his partly turned face.

"Hey!" he muttered. "Here, wait!" Automatically he tried to knock the water out of his eyes with his left fist. "Oh——"

Jinny softly caressed his forehead that was so fair against the sunbrowned lower features of his face. "Drift."

After a pause, without trying to slue his eyes round to her, he said softly: "That you, Jinny?"

"Yes. You're hurt, Drift."

"Hurt? Am I? Yes, I reckon I am—the stab I got, when I first waked up."

"There's a lot of blood——"

In a twinkling, everything came to him. "Oh, sure," he declared hastily. "I remember. A little scratch, a little scrape along the rib. Nothing to speak of. I don't mind that none at all. My ribs are some bones, you can bet you, Jinny! They'd stop a train of cars."

"You were in a dead faint."

"Who—me? *Faint!*" He twisted and stared at her indignantly. "Jinny, I was never."

"I had to throw water on you."

"Sleepy. I was sleepy—that's what. I ain't been getting my regular healthy old allowance of sleep lately."

The girl laughed, but it was a laugh less than one hair-breadth removed from convulsive hysteria. "You big, conceited gawk! You're not much hurt, I guess." She withdrew her hand from his forehead.

"Oh, I don't know about that, neither, Jinny," he instantly shifted. "Maybe I'm crimped plenty good and deep. I feel as if I had a mite of fever."

She replaced her hand on his brow. "Yes." Startlingly, she seemed to see a whole new vista. "Drift—crimped? Was it a shot?"

"Well, I reckon it was. I ain't altogether certain. But, likely, I reckon it was—a *kind* of a shot. Not really deep, though, you savvy, Jinny. Not *too* deep. Just a kind of a little crease."

"But—then—Drift!" She froze strickenly above him. "Daddy, uncle Lige——"

The cowboy's fever-thickened tongue tripped over itself in his eagerness to soothe her. "Sure all O. K., Jinny. Right as a trivet. Here, see! Whose coat is this?"

She, fighting down a shudder of sob, peered through dilated pupils. "Daddy's!"

"He was just standing where you are now. He just took this coat off his own back and put it around me."

"But—where *is* he?"

"Hazing my hoss out to Lige, somewheres. They're both sure all O. K."

Above their heads the aspen leaves fluttered, silvery, filling the sunny air with a mirage, mysterious and dimly troubling, of summer rain. Quietly, Jinny asked: "Drift, what's happened?"

"Staten rushed the band. That's all."

"*All!*" she whispered bitterly.

From his position flat on the ground he besought and coaxed her. "Don't you fret yourself none, missy. This'll make it a million times better, hey? This snakes the bridle clean off everything, don't she? Why, listen! Ain't we got the cards on' em now, Jinny? No, indeedy, don't you go clawing and fretting yourself about it a little bit. This'll wind the whole business up in a hurry. You'll spot every hoss and cattleman in the county curving along and taking a hand now. And old Buffalo whirling out with a posse from town."

Drift found some stray drops of water on his mustache which he could reach with the tip of his tongue. "Jinny, if I only had one good, big, long, strong pull——"

Mortification burned her cheeks scarlet. "Oh, my!" Pivoting, she flew for the wikiup.

"Hey!" he called. "Where's the rest of the stuff you was sprinkling me with?"

She pointed. "On the ground, there. In your hat."

"Well! What's wrong with that? Is she all used up?"

Jinny had ducked inside the wikiup and was answering from those occult depths. "No, sir. No hat. You're going to drink out of my nice gray, stone mug."

"Holy suffering!" grumbled Drift blissfully. "If you'd drunk ditch water and snow water and sulphur water from that hat as frequent and plentiful as I have!"

"Yes." Jinny emerged with the mug. "But you weren't an interesting invalid then. You hadn't been stretched out gracious knows how many hours on the hard ground, in a dead faint. Besides, I want the water in your hat for dressing your wound."

With a wave of the mug to him, she sprinted off to the rill. He, clenching his teeth and endeavoring to steady his spinning head, painfully hoisted himself up to the old leaning posture against the tree. Jinny arrived back, suffused again with shame.

She knelt and put the wet, gray mug to his hot mouth. Though it cost him dear in tearing agony, he lifted his left hand and held the mug with her, their fingers touching.

"Ah," he mumbled, reluctantly giving over. "I reckon I never wanted a plain swig of hard old Montana alkali water just that bad before."

"Another?" she asked.

"Not this second, little missy, thank you kindly."

She rose and tossed down the empty cup. "Then, get ready. Here's where I wash that wound."

Seriously, he advised against it. "Don't you tackle her, Jinny. The scratch ain't nothing, and I'm all fine and right now, with the water in me."

"I think you'd better lie back," she ordered. "You won't be able to see, then, what a mess I make of it." She eased him flat down on the ground again. "Can you unbutton your shirt or shall I?"

Her eyelids drooped, her hands shook, with timidity. The very fact that she had since childhood lived among more or less primitive conditions had kept her fundamentally apart from all men. She keyed herself up to the need, and strove to go about her preparations with an easy and businesslike air. Not very successfully, though. Drift, doing his best to smother the groans that every tiniest motion of his upper arms wrenched out of him, fumbled at the unfastening of his shirts, on which the profuse blood had clotted and dried into a villainous scale. He was quite as sympathetically nervous about the ordeal for her as she could be for herself.

The big fellow had a beautiful chest. And his flesh wasn't covered with the reminiscential simian hair.

When he had felt the bullet smash into him out there in the sage, the sear had seemed, curiously, to be across his eyeballs. It was an eight-inch, jagged, purely external wound. But the shock of it had proved sufficient to tumble him viciously off his careering horse. And the thing he had resented bumping into him must have been the ground.

"Are you ready?" warned Jinny. She had made another trip to the rill, replenishing hat and cup. Now she undid the sugar from her handkerchief. "Are you ready?" Tight-lipped, she dipped the handkerchief into the water.

"Jinny, honest, if I was you I wouldn't try——"

She bent forward and attempted to turn back the throats of his matted shirts. At first sight of the true bloody welter, though, she involuntarily started, faltering and shying away.

"Oh!" she sobbed, trembling all over, hiding her eyes. "How torn, how terrible!"

"Don't you try her, Jinny," he exhorted. "There ain't no call to."

She braced and swung back. "Yes, there is call to, Drift Weir. It's my duty. And —and—weren't these my father's horses?— it's my privilege. I *want* to do it! I'm *glad* to. Only, when I think how it must hurt——"

"Pshaw, Jinny. I don't scarcely notice her at all. Here, lend me your handkerchief a minute."

"Put down that paw."

Obediently, he did so. She rewetted the handkerchief in the hat, folded back the shirts as far as she could, and firmly and gently began to bathe.

Drift, sprawled on the gravelly ground, shivered and sighed, giving himself up into her care with ecstatically shut lids. "O Lord, Jinny! She sure does go good, that. Your hands, and that sweet, cold living water!"

Perhaps the hysteria hadn't utterly evaporated out of her. She sobbed now and again. And, for his stoicism, heaped up childish uncomplimentary names on him, while he, under her light ministrations, only shivered and sighed. He *was* sentimental.

There were several journeys for fresh water, and Drift had another heartening drink. Soon the inflamed ragged edges of his wound gaped clean.

Patient and nurse, they were by now both so engrossed that they didn't either of them suspect the advance of Six-finger Lincoln, Do-si-do Dippold, and young Frenchy Duclas, which group of aliens presently came toiling up the draw, laboriously afoot. Unobserved, unchallenged, the three drive boys entered directly in among the trees.

Six-finger coughed apologetically. "Excuse *us*."

Jinny and Drift switched round their

guilty eyes. Then, facing back again, the girl went steadfastly on with her bathing.

"Alec a-saying," Six-finger awkwardly continued to explain to Drift, "as how you was here——"

"And us on our way over to the house" —that was from Do-si-do.

"We jus' 'oof eet up," contributed young Frenchy, "dees far——"

"Never thinking about the lady's being here, you savvy——"

"To see how you was doing, old bucko and——"

"And ask eef maybeso you want somet'eeng——"

Drift answered, proud and quiet. "Thanks, boys. But you can spot for yourself what kind of treatment——"

"By gar!" cried Frenchy enviously. "I go out and geet my 'ole dam 'ead blow off!"

Slapping his own handsome bulge of chest, Do-si inquired of Drift: "Is she plowed up pretty much, old man?"

"Nothing at all. Just let a little blood out of me."

"All the same," said Jinny, "when I came over, I found him stretched out like dead on the ground."

"Jinny—Alec's girl, here—she's been trying to josh me some about it." Drift grinned contentedly.

"Now, it's clean," said the nurse. "And I've got a towel in my war sack in the wikiup. That will do for a sort of bandage till we can move you over to the house." She hopped swiftly up, retreated to the wikiup yard and disappeared.

Sharp and low-voiced, Drift queried the boys. "Any news?"

Six-finger significantly hitched a thumb over his shoulder. "We got Flannen down here in the mouth of the draw."

"The remainder," supplemented Do-si-do.

"We're fetching him in——"

"Covered up with your slicker——"

"And oh, Drift!" eagerly unfolded young Frenchy. "Daire ees not lef' een 'ees blame body one 'ole bone as beeg as dat!" He measured the length of a cigarette.

"Easy, easy!" cautioned the sick man, flipping his head toward the wikiup.

But from within there came Jinny's tremulous voice. "Oh, I hear!" She flashed pallidly out on them, the towel crumpled up between her rigid hands. "Shot—shot to death?" she demanded of the cowboys.

"Oh, no, miss," Six-finger made haste to assure her. "Not shot. Not shot up at all, miss, you understand."

"Only tromped," declared Do-si-do. "Just only tromped."

"His pony must have gone down in the rush."

"But the sheep-herders never got him, miss. Don't you worry yourself a little bit about *that*."

Jinny buried her face in the towel. Then, slowly and tragically, she returned to her nurse's work on Drift.

"Don't take on so about it, Jinny," the scotched giant on the ground entreated her. "Don't you! She couldn't be helped none. That's all in the game we play, Jinny. Like with Dave Barrensen, the other day. And my own father was killed by a hoss, too."

"And," ruminatively went on Do-si, "it seems like as if they savvied he was a-scared, and had it in for him, too, don't it? Seems like every blasted one of the plumb five hundred tried to jump all four feet onto him, once they got him down."

Jinny, sobbing, stopped her ears. "Oh! Don't!"

It was a time for tact, and Six-finger frowned horribly at Do-si. "No, don't! He ain't so almighty bad, Flannen ain't. I've seen plenty worse." The assistant drive foreman bowed respectfully before Jinny's grief. "We're just pallbearing him along over to the house, miss. To be decently prayed for and sodded under somewheres, same as if he'd died of rheumatism or sore throat or anything like that."

"On foot!" plaintively added young Frenchy. "Pallbearing 'eem ovaire on foot!"

"How many miles, Lincoln," asked Do-si-do, "do you expect we've walked last night and to-day, counting everything in?"

"T'ree million!" vociferated Frenchy.

The horseless horsemen had set to bickering among themselves with malevolent repartee. Meantime, as they did so, five other persons of various consequence were rapidly concentering on the wikiup thicket.

First to arrive was a pair that had come down unseen over the ridge at the head of the draw. The lead man of this pair walked. The other, mounted on a striking sorrel pinto, harshly directed the course along the leveled barrel of a Winchester.

At the upper edge of the thicket, he on the horse sang out, "Halt!" in a loud, hoarse voice.

CHAPTER XVI.

The three drive boys whirled. Drift likewise struggled so to see, that Jinny quickly helped him up to his old leaning position against the tree stem. Fifty yards away, under the boughs, the newcomers showed plain.

"Well, what the blazes!" mildly ejaculated Six-finger.

"Wing!" chuckled Do-si-do. "*And*—with a captive!"

"*And*," shrilly envied Prosper Duclas, "weez a 'oss!"

One lightning glance at Jinny, and Drift said to his lieutenant: "Tell Paddy to bring the young fellow in here."

Albert G. Lincoln and company, in open order and avoiding the wikiup yard, slouched gayly away through the trees; briefly escorting their mounted Irish brother back, all four of them now uniting to herd Paul Bernhardt safely along in front. Jinny, preoccupied nurse, continued to hover solicitously over Drift.

When he had ridden up nigh to his wounded drive boss, Mr. Malone pleasantly reported. "I dropped onto this here lamb weaving around out yonder toward the foot of the butte. Says he was looking for his mislaid uncle. I throwed down on him first off, to plug him for Flannen. But then I thought I'd maybe chase him in and we could burn him at the stake or something."

"Savage brute!" muttered Paul, white and twitching. "He talks as if the killing had been all on *our* side. We've lost three men, that I know of."

Three! The Double K boys whistled appreciatively, scrutinizing Paul with an augmented curiosity and interest. However, naïve attention was immediately distracted. Loping hoofs could be heard beating up the draw.

"Who's that?" demanded Drift. And, when the standing ones told him it was Hailton and Riggs, he settled back against his aspen with an unashamed glint of lazy satisfaction. "Good! We'll wait everything for them."

Peering down the draw at her approaching father and uncle, Jinny, even more than Drift, was relieved. As for the volatile tired walkers—they, too, watched and shuffled expectantly; Paul Bernhardt, perhaps, not the least. Indeed, the entire fitful group had its own angle of peculiar and dramatic quality. Malone still bestrode the striking pinto pony. Staten's young bank cashier, biting his mustache, held nervously apart. Then Frenchy, with the instinctive restless wariness of the Indian blood, happened to turn and spy under the boughs *up* the draw.

"*'I-yi!*" he called—Prosper. "'Ere ees one more. And, by gar, ain't dat de white flag 'e ees wave?"

"Joe Slater, Lincoln, wouldn't you say?" queried Do-si.

Six-finger nodded to Drift. "Slater, for a fact. And flying a white rag."

Again Drift sighed and settled with the careless and easy fatalism of the sick man. "Let Alec and Lige take charge," he declared.

Then, waiting, a kind of cold constraint fell upon them all. Jinny, without hint from her patient, busied herself in getting him another cup of water from the rill. The bronchobuster drank, and looked his profound thanks at her, but did not attempt to speak. Her towel compress was now inside his open, wet shirts.

From both ways of the draw, Hailton, Riggs and Slater rapidly closed in on the little middle-distance park of desert trees. The Green Bow ranchmen, riding abreast, arrived at the lower margin while Slater was still some rods above. They—Hailton and Riggs—each carried an extra rifle and six-shooter.

Advancing in under the cover of the cottonwoods and aspens, the Green Bow pair noted Jinny's presence here, and Paul Bernhardt's, with marked surprise. But they did not comment. For a measurable space, nobody offered to break the awkward silence.

"Well," Hailton from his saddle announced generally at last. "It has been a rare night's work. Besides the dead horses and Drift, here, hurt, we come out with only two men killed."

Six-finger, Do-si, young French, and Wing chorused in a breath—"*Two?*"

"Two. Kit Carson just now cashed in, poor old fellow. That's what kept me, Drift. We found him unconscious, with a bullet through the stomach. He died in our arms. Sims and Louie have taken him across to the wagon."

Lincoln pointed to Paul. "And this here loose Staten person Wing caught. He claims *they* lost three."

It was pat on the heels of such brisk interchange of intelligence that Slater came jogging in under the whispering leaves. He

sported a Winchester with a piece of soiled, gray undershirt drooping from the front sight of the barrel. Field glasses, too, he had slung on behind. All watched him intently. He himself, in turn, shrewdly gauged each face. But his final regard was for Paul.

"Oho!" he grunted, lean and sardonic. "Here again, hey?"

"He's a-visiting us some," volunteered Wing Malone; "at our request. Any objections?"

Joseph Slater vouchsafed his polite interlocutor half of one corner of one eye, then went on to Paul. "I sure have been doing some tall old scouting around for you."

"Flannen Lloyd and Kit Carson—you didn't also chance to be doing any tall old scouting around for them, during the course of the night, Slater, did you?" Hailton inquired.

"Nope," replied the sheep foreman.

"They're dead," Alec explained.

Slater canted over more comfortably in his off-stirrup, resting the butt of his unæsthetically beflagged rifle on bent knee. "Four, is our tally. Not counting in Bill Wickersham that's drilled through the lung. He's maybe dying."

"I told them three," said Paul. "I knew of only three."

"It'll likely be five, with Bill, when I get back," predicted the saturnine Slater.

Six-finger swung admiringly on Drift. "Well! You folks didn't do so bad out there last night, neither, did you?"

"Gents," proposed Slater to Hailton and Riggs, "you're in a hurry, and I won't waste your valuable time." He made a significant shrug toward Paul. "We got a mighty good reason for wanting this boy over at our ranch. Was you thinking any of holding him?"

It would be Frank Malone, naturally, who should respond to that lead. "Sure, we're thinking plenty of holding him," he retorted. "Why do you guess I didn't down him when I dropped onto him?"

"As questions are going," Alec Hailton put to Slater, "let me bother you with another. What, precisely, does this white flag mean?"

"Which that's very simple," answered the grim sheep boss. "We're negotiating with you for a spell of truce—till sundown or so, maybe." He indicated Paul again. "Oh—ask him. I expect he's got the say, now."

Paul stared with astonishment. "I've got the say?"

"You. That's why I'm here. This ain't no pleasure trip, certain. The Agate Valley Sheep Company needs *somebody* right now to give orders."

"Where's——" Paul wetted his lips. "Where's my uncle?"

"Dead."

Already sufficiently overwrought, the boy quivered under the word as if flicked by the lash of a whip. "What——" he choked.

"Will you kindly repeat that?" Hailton in the end required of him. "My ears must have played me a ribald trick. You didn't just now state Leo Staten was killed in the fighting last night?"

Slater verified with a bored gesture. "I did. Killed—as dead as a doornail. We wasn't onto it till daylight. We figured he'd gone back to town. Then we found him. He must have been the first to get fetched."

"By God!" cried Riggs hoarsely. "I give him credit. He was a better man than I thought."

"Yes," said Slater, "it was a tough accident."

Riggs burst out laughing; a laugh acrid and gloating and unlovely; a terrible laugh.

"Being a wild bullet," Slater went imperturbably on, "which smacked into him. He calculated he was out of range, all right. But he didn't give no consideration, seemingly, to them wild bullets. This one larruped him plumb in the ear."

"Maybe," subtly suggested Wing Malone, "that bullet comes out of the gun of some poor ignorant, misguided sheep-herder."

Frenchy tittered. Joe Slater shook his head. No, it was Fate. Mere capricious Fate, in the cloak of a long, stray shot. Off in the other world somewhere, inscrutable, Leo Staten's hour had just happened to chime, and there you were. That was all.

Meantime, an undisguised tremor of exultation had passed over the quaking-asp grove. Paul Bernhardt felt it, and his face was a study. To begin with, shock, bewilderment, had had absolutely the upper hand in him. Now that ebbed, gave place to a reflux of cold fury. As he stood there, apart, among the slender poplar trees, he reached maturity in a bound. The aloof and ironic half-baked student-dilettante, the casual boyish experimenter in verse writing and adventurous romance—that, forever, was gone. So this was the West, then. Dead!

It was the supreme crisis of twenty-four years. Quietly young Bernhardt addressed himself to Hailton: "Permit me. You probably suspect how extremely little I have had to do in this tragic business. I am a stranger here, understanding next to nothing of the facts. I don't know what provision my uncle has made for the future. As prisoner, could I be of help, legal or other, to your cause? I doubt it. And I should very much like to be allowed to take charge of my uncle's body. My aunt will be prostrated."

A reasonable enough speech, to the ear. It may or may not have carried conviction to that rather bizarre, concentrated, immobile knot of confused and congested passions and intelligences huddled for a moment, there, under the gayly fluttering leaves. The tones of Paul's voice, if a trifle throaty, had been even and restrained.

Hailton motioned to Wing Malone with the tip of his rifle. "Give him his horse," ordered the senior Green Bow partner. "Let him go."

CHAPTER XVII.

"Here's the program," stated Alec. "Or, such fragments of it as Lige and I have got worked out. Drift and Jinny go right into town. Jinny, you can drive the spring wagon, can't you? With Drift snuggled down in a pile of robes and blankets behind. Flannen and old Kit must be sent to town, too, for religious service and the burial. But perhaps to-night will do for that. We won't have to make much of a formal report to Buffalo, I fancy. He'll be riding up to the door of the ranch before we can bat our eyes twice."

"And," mentioned Six-finger, "about the antelopes?"

"That's the big point, the critical point. Those antelopes. For, whoever else suffers in this matter, Mrs. Barrensen mustn't be allowed to. Lige and I don't know, naturally, how things are going to swing with us. No use wasting our energy trying to guess riddles. They'll have to make the next move. Then we'll see what we shall see. Only, let any eventuality in the deck come out, those five hundred Double K ponies have got to be rounded up again as fast as it can be done, and hustled over to Dakota. The fiasco last night was all our wretched fault. And, having accepted the responsibility of the drive, we're pretty nearly due to stand under. So we hope you boys who switched with the Brightwater outfit aren't thinking of quitting us."

"No, we ain't liable to think of quitting you none," Six-finger slowly responded. "Not if you want us to stick. Are we, buckos? It'd seem too much like them woolly sheep-herder warriors had scared us off."

The boys nodded vigorously. Alec retook up the thread.

"Well, we realize—Lige and I—that we couldn't blame you for a minute. Not if you threw down your hands cold. But, especially on Mrs. Barrensen's score, we hope you won't. We'll never be able to forgive ourselves the awful botch we've engineered. It's cost two lives, the lives of two of our friends. Our only possible excuse is the state we've been in here latterly. Conditions on this ranch are bad. And the sudden prospect of having all you boys legitimately massed up around us last night——

"I suppose Lige and I simply went a little off our heads. The chance unbalanced us. I can say for us—we didn't believe they'd actually get down to holds and fight. They let us chop their fence into scraps yesterday without making a sign."

"All the same," Malone grumbled, "I told you at the dance this clatter wouldn't have no luck. She *couldn't!* With Dave Barrensen soaring off and dying on us at the start that way."

"Shut up, you blasted, low-grade red-eye croaker, you!" snarled Six-finger. "Your dark-lady dives into the future don't interest nobody here. We ain't *all* as ignorant and illiterate and sooperstitious as a flock of Mississippi niggers!"

Hailton was too restless to remain with them very long. "You understand," he said, "Buffalo may have to arrest Lige and me. Staten has partners. We may have to go to jail. But even that can't be let interfere for one day with the gathering of the Barrensen roans."

Before setting out, the ranchman again cast his doubtful and disturbed glances toward Jinny. Riggs was not here; they had never been in the habit of leaving the girl alone among a lot of men. Alec was manifestly just on the edge of asking Jinny to jump up on Gabe with him and ride home. Strange she didn't offer to go herself. But a hint of something in her carriage and behavior struck him, a completely new note. She had become older, more her own mistress.

That was as much of the alteration as he could penetrate. He left her, riding away by himself, down the draw and across the shining thread of creek and through the dark-green bow of meadow to the house.

In a reasonable while, Tom Sims came careering over through the sage with the spring wagon. Heaving Drift up, all at the quaking-asp grove straightway piled into the light vehicle; a formidable burden. Sims spread the glad tidings that Lige and Louie were importantly engaged in the ranch kitchen, boiling about a tubful of coffee and frying a quarter of beef. The four Double K boys waxed blithe to boisterousness.

By nine o'clock, then, Flannen Lloyd's body had been brought over and laid under the tarpaulin, shoulder to shoulder against old Kit Carson, in the cool dark of the tool shed. The horse corral was populous with diverse drowsing cayuses. Much steaming strong food and drink had been devastated.

In a word, some definite basis of operation was in process of being established for the day.

Joe Slater, this morning on a peaked brown pony, and Paul Bernhardt on the sorrel pinto, trotted briskly side by side for the ridge, or series of ridges, which slantingly shut off Jinny's draw from direct egress to the foot of the butte. As with the speculative knot of horse and cattle people they had just quitted, utter silence reigned over the chill companionship of the sheep pair. Paul's hardening eyes many times sought the profile, impassive and flat, bouncing along opposite him.

"Look here!" he demanded. "I'm not going ahead and tearing at myself needlessly? There's no doubt about this? Uncle Leo is dead?"

"I never saw anybody deader," returned Slater dryly. "A bullet through the brain."

After that, another extended blanket of incommunicativeness fell upon them. The peaked, brown pony and the pinto zigzagged up out of the draw and descended the far slope into a wider, shallower basin. Paul ran a hand across his brow, and put a second query to the profile of the taciturn and unprepossessing ranch boss.

"What makes you think I might have some voice in the management of this sheep business?"

"What makes me? Because it's been understood here. That's what. In the air. If anything was to happen to Mr. Staten, it's been understood here he'd likely leave his control to you."

"Slater, he didn't attempt to hide his disappointment in me, did he? From you?"

The foreman took an ample, fresh bite of plug tobacco. "Nope."

"But there's still a fair chance he hasn't had opportunity to make a new will. Is that it?"

"I guess that's about it."

Another three-quarters of a mile of pregnant silence intervened between them. They were in a winding high coulee by this, skirting the butte to the south.

"Well," pronounced Paul suddenly, and the statement had something of the official character of an oath about it; "well, if uncle Leo has been kind enough to leave any of his interests in my care, and if he can see from where he is, I believe he's going to be a little better satisfied with me in the future."

Joe, the sheep boss, hitched in his saddle and with fixity examined the possible heir to the network of Staten economic responsibilities. (In his heart, Joe knew it was the only too *probable* heir.) "Huh!" he muttered, not overimpressed.

"No, I suppose I don't look the wild West part," interpreted Paul bitterly. "But perhaps that's not necessary. I may be able to show you a thing or two. Hailton and Riggs are going to reckon with me."

Slater spat, impassive. "Mr. Staten didn't have no quarrel with Hailton and Riggs. He didn't have nothing particular up his sleeve against *them*. It was their ranch he wanted."

"All right. I'm not forgetting that, either."

Whereupon Joe went on to deliver himself of an absolutely startling note. Hero worship!

"Your uncle, boy—Leo Staten—he was sure a smooth, keen, far-sighted big man. Bright and practical. The only feeling he had for anything was about business. I ain't never seen the likes of him before, and I expect I never will again. I'm mighty good and sorry he had to pass out. It was plumb bad luck."

"How did he come to bank so heavily on sheep, Slater?"

The eyes above the brown pony grew reflective. "How? He was always studying new games. Not mining. He didn't seem to cotton to the notion of mining. But he kept squinting about over the country, and

soon he spotted wool. Sheep was sure going to be the live stock in our end of the territory. The grass and the lay of the land here is suited to 'em to a T. He watched what sheep was doing other places, farther south; and, you're whistling, he didn't fritter away no years getting ready to deal. No, sir! He soon spotted that sheep would have horses and cattle clean backed off the Breed County board."

It was now Joe who had swung round to the talking mood. He chewed and spat more vivaciously. Paul brooded for another half mile.

"Very well," he abruptly flung out then. "Done! If I get the chance, I take uncle Leo's cue. Slater, if I wanted to move quick, would our whole outfit of men stick by me?"

"Any man," the sardonic sheep boss informed him, "will stick by you—sure. All you got to do is riffle the spondulics a little liberal. It don't amount to much, in the end. Leo Staten savvied that. For a job like this, he didn't balk at no sniveling extras. He just shed out the yellow boys free and careless, asking nary a question."

"And if I take charge," declared Paul, "that same policy goes. Not only will it be maintained. It'll be strengthened. Nobody will have room for a breath of complaint—you follow me, Slater? You, least of all!"

The lean, spatulate-nosed ranch boss nodded. He was now distinctly more interested. "Which any policy like that," he observed, "pulls my vote, long and loud." And then, after a becoming pause: "You're dead in earnest about carrying on this here personal feud?"

"I'm in earnest," assured Paul.

"The idea being," Slater suggested, "to pitch smack ahead with the fighting?"

"The idea being," Paul swore, "so help me God, to drive bands of sheep over the scattered ashes of Hailton and Riggs' ranch house!"

So much for Paul's word of mouth. His scheme of reprisals, however, included also another detail. This was a project, flagrant and obscure, very individual, having to do with primitive male passion and conquest. It constituted the romantic note. The scene of the hypothetical pillage was to be a virginal flowery tent among poplar trees.

That minor point of campaign the Chicago boy scrupulously refrained from indicating to his unromantic companion. Why? Murder had already been done. More was to ensue. What sense to scruple about the mere rapine? A medieval Italian in Paul's temper and position would openly have canvassed the corollary with the main issue. Not so young Bernhardt.

CHAPTER XVIII.

When Hailton and Riggs, in the press of their early morning galloping, had arranged between themselves to send Jinny in to town, they had neglected to consult one essential member to the parley. They had failed to consider Jinny. This was a conspicuous oversight. For, about Jinny Hailton, everybody within a hundred miles of the ranch would have agreed solidly on one thing. Drift had already stated the case to himself. Paul Bernhardt had stated it to Jinny, and, after a reluctant moment, had won her frank concurrence. She was a perfectly spoiled girl.

Jinny had been born in the mountains of Pennsylvania, toward the close of 1862. Her birthplace was the village of Ebensburg, high up in the middle of Cambria County; the month, November; the year, second of our bloody four of defense against the separationist Rebellion. A black time, that, truly, for a little girl's nativity. The father could not be home to stand by, to help the young mother through her first blinding travail. He was away serving as volunteer private of infantry in the Army of the Potomac.

A month after Jinny's troubled entrance into the world, in December, Alexander Hailton, then thirty-three years old, received at Fredericksburg the bayonet thrust in the thigh which gave him his permanent staccato limp. On the other hand, though, the severity of that wound also presently brought him full discharge from military duty; and he returned out of hospital to his wife and the child he had not yet seen.

Hailton was a graduate of the arts department of Pennsylvania College, Gettysburg; and for a term he had studied law in Philadelphia. But the law did not appeal to him. His elder brother being a successful county-seat attorney and politician, Alec might have had a very fair chance in this field. People thought it perverse that he shouldn't care to avail himself of his luck. Gradually he came to be looked on, in the influential Cambria governing circles, as a queer sort of over-fastidious person, finicking; and he, for his part, made no semblance of covering up his

discontent with the tone and administration of local popular affairs.

However, as his own brother must have been regarded as a chief offender in these matters, and as Alec had now a frail wife and child to support, so, for ten years, he edited and ran his family's Ebensburg newspaper; admittedly, under his brother's leading, the organ of a corrupt political faction, but likewise the foremost weekly of the county. Aside from its political uses, which he could not control, Alec strove to make the paper decent and interesting. All the while, though, he had only the most bitter contempt and loathing for himself.

Then, in the summer of '72, his wife died. Eventually he decided to take his daughter West.

He had inherited a bit of money from the senior Mrs. Hailton's estate; seven thousand dollars. This materially aided him in his freedom. Equally with himself, Elijah Riggs shared in that freedom. Lige was an unattached man, forty-four years old as against Alec's forty-five. His home town had been Huntingdon, on the Juniata. They had met while serving in the Union armies. Before and after that time, Lige had been a dissolute watchmaker. But when he was invited to Alec's home he began to worship the baby girl of three as a devout monk might worship at the shrine of the Virgin. No longer, in fact, could Elijah Riggs be named "sot" or "tramp." He was a steady, loyal workman. The two men and the little girl went West together.

As for Jinny's going into hiding during the present sheep campaign—well, hardly. She had always had her way with both of these men, and it was not strange that she could have her way now. If they stayed, she stayed. She had slipped through dangers with them on the ranch before. So she would again. Alec and Lige explained the situation to her, reasonably, over and over. They scolded, they pleaded with her, they stormed. They did not seem to know this girl. Jinny, with her dimple, was adamant.

At length they hooked up the quick-footed buckskin road team. But, instead of relieving Jinny, it was her father who climbed into the driver's seat. Alec occupied the spring wagon alone. Or, that is to say, there were only the empty bodies of Flannen Floyd and old Kit Carson spread out under the tarpaulin behind him.

Drift, too, odd as it may appear, braved the sheep-herders by remaining quietly on the ranch. Immediately he had sensed the first echo of Jinny's stand, he concluded that he was not quite up to the painful wagon jaunt in to town. Even the sketchy trip over from the draw had undermined his constitution, he confessed. So he would just go ahead resting himself easy here a few days, if nobody had any kick, and Doc Satterly could chase out and do the sewing job, or whatever he reckoned was needful, pat on the ground.

Only the most imperative stock work directly about the ranch was cared for. Nobody, of the home-staying six, ventured above a mile from the house. Riggs had not had one wink of sleep the night before, so he now turned in for a couple of hours. Wagonwheel and Dixie and Louie snatched intermittent naps when they could. Drift Weir slept or waked at will, according to his invalid fancy. Jinny alone, as became a nurse, never closed her eyes.

Sleeping or waking, it was enough and to spare the happiest day of Drift's colorful life. Jinny continued to tend him assiduously. And he, more than half cheating, calmly lay back and suffered her to. Doctor Satterly took some of the wind out of his sails. The doc arrived about three in the afternoon, and, upon examining the patient very meticulously, poked reflective thumbs into the armholes of his buff waistcoat.

Yes, he admitted, under Jinny's anxious pressure—yes, there might possibly have been some legitimate symptoms of shock early in the morning. He didn't question—there might very possibly have been. But, if there *had* been, you understand, they had certainly all subsided by now. For example, pulse? Excellent. Fever? Not a trace. Appetite? O Lord! And here he, the misguided man of medicine, had fetched a tonic! As to the bullet wound itself—it was as clean and healthy as if Nature had made it.

Satterly commended Jinny lavishly on her cold-water treatment. He got out his surgical kit and did put in an agonizing brace of stitches. The wound was too jagged, though, for much sewing. Unceremonious but deft, the doctor packed it, gave elaborate orders for dressings and straightway recalled his pot-bellied bay mare. "See you later," he said to Drift.

He had come in Alec's spring wagon, leading the mare behind. For Sheriff Jenks had not offered to lock Alec up, or to do any-

thing with him, except to try to elicit all details. Buffalo was, in fact, a shade flabbergasted by the sudden dimensions this case had taken on. Leo Staten was dead. There could be no two guesses about that. His body had been brought in to town.

As to this point, the ranch, however, knew the truth well before three o'clock. By about noon, visitors began to drop in. From both up and down the valley they appeared, though chiefly from down; a-saddle and on wheels, all intent for the last and fullest syllable of fight development. The rumor of the stampede had risen like a gigantic signal smoke in the morning sky. Several of the lower valley riders had even glimpsed the dead sheepman, en route to his house in town, with their own eyes.

The latest of the visiting ranchmen to reach Green Bow was Jared Crossett. He came spinning up to the house in his dusty buckboard, holding the reins over a beautiful pair of thick-necked black stallions, which were rendered drivable only by dint of having their heads kept wide apart, a steel jockey stick running from inside ring to inside ring of their two froth-dripping bits. The old man crouched in the buckboard absolutely alone. How, with his spindling arms, he managed that pair of fiery steeds was a mystery.

But nobody could have accused him of being a timid person. The magnificently outré carpet slippers were to-day still on his hurting feet, and the rolled-up overalls, sans any trousers underneath, flapped on his skinny shanks. He had driven the twenty-five miles over from the Candlestick via Burnt Robe, and did not have to be told one item of the news.

It was Drift Weir, lying half asleep on Alec's bed, who drew a first cackling broadside from him. "Oho!" chuckled the old man. "You *will* quit on folks right before the round-up, hey? You'll leave 'em in the hole—what? And go gallivanting about over the country, getting your fool ribs shot to smithereens! You will, hey?"

Placid and sleepy-eyed, Drift, grinning, stretched his massive legs. Already—this would be about six o'clock—he was becoming a trifle bored with the blankets and his invalid rôle.

"Well," Mr. Crossett went genially on, "you didn't hamper *me* none, mind. No, sir! And don't you go thinking you did, neither. That round-up started out on the tick, same as usual." With a slat of his loose plate of teeth, he whirled on Alec and Lige. "Know what day this is?"

"Yes," replied Alec. "Decoration Day."

The white beard rubbed his withered, knotty hands together with delight. "Sure!" he shrilled. "Decoration Day—that's what day it is. Do you guess Leo Staten—gosh-dang his thieving Dutch soul to Gehenna!—do you guess he remembered it was Decoration Day?"

"I've no means of telling," said Alec. "Why do you ask?"

"Why? Because it's the real appropriate day for him to cash in on, comrade—that's why. He couldn't have cleared out on no better day. I only hope he lived long enough, after the bullet smashed into him, to remember. But I'm afraid maybe he didn't."

Alec bent puzzled brows. "I don't think I follow you."

"No? Well, you fought for your country once, now, didn't you? When she was in trouble, hey?"

Hailton nodded. "I did."

"Of course you did. And you got a rip in the leg to show for it, too. And so did Lige, here, fight. And so did I, consarn my old pictures, though I was past fifty when they took me! We all fought. But that Staten—did *he* fight?"

"I never happened to hear of it, if he did."

"Not much you wouldn't hear of it, comrade. Not much! For he didn't do it. No, sir! He was too keen on saving his dirty skin. He sneaked out of it—that's what he did. *I* know. He comes over to this land when he's a babe in arms, and his father snoops around and has himself naturalized. Bah! So our Mr. Leo Staten is a voting American citizen from the go off."

"You've got his history down fine, it seems."

"Bah! He was a free and voting American citizen from the go off, I tell you. But what of that, hey? And now—tee-hee-hee—he crawls out and gets himself drilled through the head—tee-hee-hee—on a Decoration Day, over a parcel of stinking sheep!"

The somewhat salty tang of all this—well, it had interest. In 1881 the tragedy of the Civil War was still a near and graphic memory. Everybody in the Green Bow circle pricked heedful ears.

Alec inquired: "You actually know he refused to serve?"

"Certainly I know! Once last year, after we'd had a little run-in, what did I up and do, comrade? Why, I wrote back to some stock friends of mine in Chicago and asked 'em to trail down his record. By cracky! He was a draft dodger, that's what our slick Mr. Leo Staten was! That's how he come to be out here in the Territory so blasted early."

Hailton and Riggs were exchanging one of their customary and significant flashes of eye. "It *is* a kind of poetic justice," Alec murmured. "Isn't it?"

No word came up the Agate from Six-finger that evening. Evidently he and his men had had to cross over into the upper Brightwater. It was an excellent hide-and-seek country, spacious, crannied.

Despite the pressure of the busy season, a dozen ranchmen and cowboys volunteered to remain the night on Green Bow. But nobody really believed anything would happen in a hurry from further sheep aggression; not, at least, this week; perhaps never. The blow of Staten's death had been too heavy. A complete new set of adjustments would have to be made. Even if the disorganized sheep-herders were to be rallied for more fighting, it would take days.

So Hailton and Riggs firmly refused to let any of the volunteer stockmen stay.

CHAPTER XIX.

Then the ranch quieted into a rather trying hour. As the swift, thin veils of spring dark filtered down, and the reports of all the various callers of the afternoon had time to sink in and be digested, it was difficult not to chafe. The Green Bow partners became very silent. Jinny sat with Drift. Alec stared, abstracted, at an open account book. Lige walked moodily about, chewing his grizzled beard, pulling on his pipe.

Presently, he—Riggs—went away out of the house, into the stable. He wanted to be alone, to reckon up the odds of the situation a bit on his own hook. For example, there were the figures of Gus Barr and Henry Brinker. Lige briefly recapitulated these.

The second member of the concern of the Agate Valley Sheep outfit, August Barr, was a typical merchant; timid, sedentary, cautious; the out-and-out tradesman. He made their big, general store in Burnt Robe pay handsome dividends. That was his job, and he tended strictly to it. As for Brinker—he, living in Helena, could virtually be disregarded, for the moment.

Another little routine shopkeeper, this Brinker was; a specialist in hardware. Only, several years ago, something of drama, upsetting and unforeseen, had occurred to him. Without any warning at all, he had proceeded to catch the mining fever and go clean off his bald mercantile head. He had removed from Burnt Robe to the territorial capital; and nothing short of Staten's forceful personality and arguments could now ever have induced him to put money into so slow a business as sheep. But—what sense to think twice of Hen Brinker? He couldn't possibly be on hand in the valley to-night.

That boy, though—the sneering kid of a pilgrim—young Bernhardt? How about him?

In the quaking-asp conference of the morning, Lige had noted Paul's changing face closely, had marked down for future consideration the fury and resolution which gradually took shape in it. Now the ranchman was giving that consideration, fixedly. After all, could they be so dead positive no flip-up would happen here to-night? Having turned the chances thoroughly over in his mind, Riggs strolled back into the house.

When full night had fallen, he mentioned to Alec: "Guess I'll just climb on my horse and take a little chase around—to make sure there's no deviltry in the wind."

"Good idea," said Hailton. "I'll go with you."

"No," Lige objected. "It ain't worth the two of us. I'm only doing it because I've been indoors all day. I'm kind of restless for a taste of air and movement."

Alec recognized the pretty imperative need for one of them to stick at the house; and, as he had been away most of the day, he did not insist. But he suggested Wagonwheel or Dixie as companion.

Shrugging and pooh-poohing all proffers of companionship aside, Riggs held to his original plan. This was nothing to collect a party for. It was only a ride he felt like taking, to work off his unaccustomed smother of being cooped up the whole flight of a sun. And a holiday, too, at that!

So, about ten, quite by himself, the little ex-watchmaker launched out on his bedtime constitutional. Even a relatively unobservant person, however, might have perceived that he slipped the ranch double-barreled duck gun along under his arm.

It would have required a slightly more penetrative eye, perhaps, to follow Lige's devices at the corral. For here he did not saddle his own pet pony, Barnum, a cloudy dapple-gray. Instead, he calmly picked for himself—without bothering to consult her in the matter—Jinny's gift horse from Drift, Trix. In addition to being a mighty fast mare with a lightweight rider, Trix was black in color.

Riggs at ten o'clock went easily out across the meadow and forded the creek. There he swerved a point or two south on his eastward course. He might as yet be going nowhere in particular, or he might be steering direct for the home ranch of the Agate Valley Sheep Company, which lay seven miles over behind the butte. Agate Valley Sheep Company. They had used always to say "Staten's." But the sheep enterprise, though it was so young and new, so based on the virgin soil, had already outlived its cunning sponsor. Lige's somber brain brooded on that item.

The night wrapped itself about the lonely horseman, an altogether different affair from the preceding one of the rush. No subtle promise of rain whispered in this brittle sage, spicing the air with its pungency. The sky was glorious; high-starred, quiet, like deep summer, alluring and sufficiently cool. There had been a sickle of new moon, but that was by now dropped out of sight behind the jagged rim of mountain.

Trix footed it briskly along the way. A lane, a faintly wagon-rutted track, cut the lush wire grass as far as the creek. Then, immediately on fording, one was up through the passage in the low bank and out facing the flats of sage. From this meadow boundary on, Lige went very circumspectly.

To the northward of the butte, the country was impassable, except through the narrow, rocky Two-Sleep Cañon. For several miles a gravelly perpendicular bluff disclosed the break of a lofty plateau; and, before it, spiked and spiny ridges were everywhere interwoven. To the south, the ground, though uneven, could be traversed. As homesteader here, Lige would certainly know and avail himself of each favoring wash and gully. During his four years of service in the Federal infantry, he had won a trifle of reputation for himself as a scout.

To-night, then, he had crossed the most of the level eastward sweep of valley bottom, and was about to adventure on into the hills. The mouth of a wide-jawed and shallow ravine spread amply in front of him, shrouded in heavy shadow, but also studded every few yards with large amorphous blotches of yet intenser gloom, which were clumps of sagebrush. The sage, for some reason, grew extraordinarily rank and tall just in here.

Riggs' idea, as it now developed, was obviously to thread that ravine. But he had not more than got well within the jaws, over the line of dense foothill obscurity, when Trix, who had been shacking comfortably along, began to show symptoms of uneasiness. Her ears went up, and she fretfully tossed her head. Once she snorted and half shied.

Not a tinge of any of these odd manifestations was lost on Elijah Riggs. If only he could *see!* He thought quick, peering futilely about with his puckered, bespectacled eyes. An island of especially profound dark, about a rod in advance, was bearing hard on his left side. Trix danced gingerly toward it, throwing her head till the bridle chains rattled.

When they had got almost upon that big patch of sage, Lige reached out his left hand forward, as if to do something with Trix's bit. This allowed him to stretch his upper body along the mare's neck, and to loosen his right foot from the stirrup.

Of a sudden, while still in that position, deft as a cat, he jerked his right leg clean over the cantle of the saddle and flopped prone on the ground. Trix, expecting no such maneuver—she had received not the ghost of a hint of warning—did not know exactly what to do. The bridle reins continued to rest on her neck. Whereas, if it had been intended for her to stop, they would have been snapped over her ears.

So she hesitated—but only for a flash. As Lige and his shotgun hit the ravine floor, he dealt her a vicious wipe across the hocks with his quirt. She started wildly, and jumped and ran, straight on up the hollow into the hills.

As for the junior Green Bow man, in one and the same movement with his unconventional dismount and the slash of the quirt, he took to rolling, ignominiously over and over, till he was safe in the shelter of the big sagebush. But even this might not be secure. Lige thought it advisable to shift. Except for Trix's retreating hoofbeats, there was not a sound. Always nursing his shotgun most carefully, creeping and crouching

and rolling, Riggs made for another clump of sage which he could dimly discern, near by, farther again to the left.

He won to it, absolutely without mishap, until he had tried to worm himself snug under its cover. Then, with a wrench of nerves, he found he was plump up against the body of a second man.

Tumbling unceremoniously against the mute stranger, Riggs happened at that precise stage of his roll to have the shotgun held out in front of him, on an angle. It was the barrel of the shotgun, indeed, which touched the other bush tenant first. He—the other bush tenant—must have been lying there with a naked knife in his fist. For greeting, he made a murderous lunge at Riggs, the Green Bow man as instinctively trying to fend him off with the shotgun.

Steel on steel, the driven knife blade hit against Lige's broad gun barrel, twanged and ran glancingly down, evidently scraping the clenched fingers behind. Low and foul, a voice cursed; a boy's voice, unknown to Riggs. Altogether unscratched, Lige had escaped the blow; and for a breath the cramped knife wielder could not recover, to strike again. In that breath, the skirmish ended.

As befitted a watchmaker, Riggs was tolerably deft and accurate with his hands. Like lightning now he had tipped the barrel of his duck gun farther toward the unseen bushwhacker, knocked back both hammers and fired. The ten-gauge spoke with a dreadful double roar. Lige rolled out from under the sage and away, with no sign of pursuit.

Immediately, shivering the ravine waves of echo, a dozen yells rose on what had been a moment before the serene and idyllic night, coming from all quarters round, near and far. Here was the cat out of the bag, with a vengeance! Silence no longer mattered. The herders began to close in on Riggs, continuing to vent as much hue and cry as comported with their respect for his gun.

The cattleman thought it healthy to get flat down and crawl, making for the salient big clump of sagebrush which he had earlier deserted. Trix was gone, so he couldn't any more be located by her outstanding shape. He never slackened nerve or muscle on that racking crawl till he had reached the new shelter, under which, he made sure, no second ambushing devil lurked. Completely round the large islet of sage he wriggled, tentative, exploring; and on the south side found a whopping badger hole, with a young mountain of earth heaped up before it.

In the thin, dry night air, even the faintest sigh or rustle carried with amazing clarity and persistence. As to the double boom of a shotgun, it seemed that must have been heard in Burnt Robe. Anyway, there could be no conceivable doubt about the ranch. The ranch was roused. Riggs only hoped Alec and the few boys wouldn't attempt to sally out to the rescue. Lige himself was in an unmistakable pinch. But at least, fighting alone, he could cut loose without fear at any hint of target he suspected. Whereas the sheep-herders, on the contrary, must be mighty careful not to kill each other. It was a ticklish game for them, play it as they liked. By the by, what had become of the sheep-herders' horses?

Horses! Lige debated very seriously. Should he risk making a break for the house on foot? But—no. Out beyond the shadow of the ravine jaws, wan starshine flooded the range. The bushwhackers would be practically certain to pot him in that light.

In the sheep alignment, these details of relative good and bad didn't go altogether unregarded, either. As expedition captain, Joe Slater fumed and squirmed. He had gambled on catching the Green Bow people napping. Now, in addition to his having lost a hand, the alarm was sprung; he knew what reception he might expect at the house. Every minute wasted made the conditions of the job worse. Yet here they still fiddled, over a single lone man out in the hills.

Joe had his crew of hoodlums flung clean across the ravine in an irregular semicircle. Quietly he proceeded to call them in, one after another, till they were all centered on a small fanlike area directly behind Lige's patch of sage. Slater was convinced the Green Bow scout, whoever he might be, skulked under that special bush. The fellow must somehow have been able to manage the twenty yards or so over to it. But he couldn't have got any farther. They were spread too fast on his heels, and the edge of starlight out yonder blocked him off in front.

So Joe prepared a handsome little Memorial Day fusillade for him. Stationing the score of raiders in such order as to permit them to rake every inch of ground under the bush, Slater cautioned them against all fir-

ing into the same spot. Some were to take the right, some the middle, some the left.

In curt shadows of undertone, the sheep boss laid down his final word. "When I whistle, let fly. We'll just give him one hell of a volley, then plug ahead for across the creek, leaving him alive or dead."

Abruptly, sharp and clear, the whistle spurted out. A score of guns of various sorts responded, and Lige's tough clump of sage shook and crackled and splintered under the onset of that hail of lead.

After which, without hazarding an examintion as to result, the sheep-herders hurried back up the ravine to where their horses remained in charge of an elderly member of the company. All straightway climbed into the saddle; and, discreetly skirting the sage-bush of enigma, which had shown no mark of life since the volley, they rode by, at the extreme southern flare of the ravine, into the belt of open starshine; and so valiantly on across the flat toward Green Bow ranch house.

CHAPTER XX.

At that ranch house, as Lige had justly depended, everybody was indeed on tiptoe. And this did not exclude the faithful nurse Jinny, nor her late fainting charge, George Decker Weir.

Through the thick-daubed walls of log, these two pairs of ears, so involuntarily keen and noticing, caught the report of the far duck gun with ease. Jinny was away and gone out of the room in a twinkling. As for ailing Drift, he didn't waste many motions, either. Rising, almost with relief, from the growing tedium of his bed, the big puncher brushed last night's flesh wound aside as if it had never been.

The five other inhabitants of the place had scrambled pell-mell from their various quarters to the east side of the main house, and beyond, to the lip of dry irrigating ditch which bordered the meadow. Drift without bother found a couple of shirts belonging to Alec. His Winchester, cartridge belt, and six-shooter, all nicely cleaned and oiled and filled, lay on a near-by packing-box improvisation of a table. In his rested blond head was now no thought of cheating for Jinny's favors. He coolly joined that eager conclave outside the house door. The first words he picked up, as he approached, were being wrung from between the set and grinding teeth of Alec Hailton.

"Oh, Lige, Lige!" the senior Green Bow man kept muttering. "Oh, my old friend Lige!"

"It's over in the Long Ravine!" sobbed Jinny. "I can tell by the echo. And I almost think I saw the flashes of the guns!"

Wagonwheel tentatively clucked his tongue, proffering: "Do you want us to make a try for him, boss?"

Hailton, in turn, swung on Drift. Evidently he, too, had forgot the flesh wound of last night. "Could we do anything? In time, I mean? It's been minutes since his double barrel spoke. And there were anyway twenty rifles in that volley."

Drift was spared the need of reply.

"Listen!" cried Jinny. "Horses! They're coming!"

All heard. But, practically as soon as heard, the sounds of the advance died away.

"They've maybe thought it silkier to get down and take to foot," Dixie Lewis commented. "Just the same, I reckon thev'll be here mighty sudden."

Alec moved, and a ray of lamplight from the house fell athwart his face. "They're going to rush us. To repeat, exactly as they did with the horse band."

"Well," rumbled Louie Lilyard. "I guess dey learn we ain't stampede like das pony —yah!"

The house lamps had quick to be extinguished, the dogs sent ranging out. All hands were put to gathering weapons and ammunition, stacking up every available resource.

In the blind and groping dark of the kitchen, however, Drift felt a clutch on his big forearm. "God help me!" whispered Alec's taut voice. "What shall I do with her—my little girl? She wouldn't go to town!"

"We'll have to splice ourselves into a ring around her," the cowboy groaned. "That's all I know. It's away too late for her to try to ride off anywhere."

Unsuspectedly close to them, Jinny herself nipped the problem. "I'm not going to *try* to ride off anywhere. I'm going to stay right here, beside those that love me. I've got uncle Lige's rifle, and only just let me see a crawling beast to shoot at!"

Drift choked with his usual confused emotion over anything involving at once danger to her and separation from him. "Likely there won't be much to see," he predicted.

"But, you'd better believe, we don't want to pass up no bets!"

At the back of his own head, the giant wrangler had already made a pretty definite forecast, and come to an iron-bound resolution. The forecast was that the ranch buildings could not be defended. They sprawled too wide, and there was too much cover all roundabout. It would be easy to carry them, one by one. So, from the beginning, Drift looked on them as lost. And the resolution? No matter what happened here to-night, the cowboy determined, he would not stir a dozen feet from the side of Jinny Hailton. As an invalid, he was entitled to some special consideration.

The house garrison consisted of four able-bodied men, with Drift, who could not hoist gun to shoulder, and a girl. The three unscathed punchers—ranking cook Louie along with that lot—promptly volunteered to scout out as far as the edges of the buildings. This was more to egg on the watchfulness of the dogs than in any hope of effective shooting. Alec let the trio go.

So Dixie stole off westward across the road to the upper sheds and corrals, opening gates and setting the held stock free. Wagonwheel chose the horse stable, which was south of the house; and Louie took the large tool shed, to the north. These were the most outlying of the Green Bow cluster of shacks. The bunk house stood between stable and house proper. To the east, no abutment of logs whatever protected that family bedroom and living-room exposure from the fair expanse of flat meadow.

First alarm came in an astonishing short space of time. It was at the sheds above the road. Abruptly the dogs up there with Dixie burst out into a wild hullabaloo, followed, on the dot, by a vicious spatter of shots and a chorus of wounded animal yelpings. Dixie soon slid down to the house.

"The sage all around must be lousy with 'em," he reported. "I had to climb pronto, or they'd have cut me off from getting back."

Alec asked him if he were hurt.

"Not a feather!" declared Dixie. "I don't reckon they was even shooting at me. I whanged away myself at anything I thought I spotted. But it was like ink in them sheds. And I didn't remark no whistle of bullets flirting about my ears. Shoo! They certain tore up the dogs plenty, though. From what I could make out, it seemed they was centering on the hay corral."

A considerable chunk of haystack still reared itself unconsumed in a corral just across the road; and the aptness of the cowboy's deductions concerning it briefly glared forth. Above the ragged and precious mound of last summer's dry grass, a tongue of flame leaped into the quiet air. Fire! Curling and ruddy, the light of that torch hit some pairs of anxious eyes behind the ranch-house windows with shock.

"Great God!" shouted Alec. "The coyotes! They're going to burn us out!"

Jumping blithely toward the zenith of black night, the flames rioted in color, surprising and cruel and glorious, vivid as a dream. Almost immediately, the line of stock sheds beyond lifted into a slower and duller glow. That whole upper building area was in fact now one irregular conflagration, crackling like thorns.

Fire! And, from the house—what could be done? What, indeed? Nothing!

To the road alone, the distance was all of two hundred yards. Yet, despite even the strength of that overhead flare, scarcely so much as a flitting human shadow ever betrayed itself. The six guards wasted their cartridges on each suspicion, on each mere hint of provocation. But the chances of a kill were remote. And not a single answering bullet seemed to be returned against their own log walls.

Drift, shooting from the hip, cursed savagely under his breath at the degree of his helplessness. Still, he was never tempted to quit his post beside Jinny. Presently Danny, Lige's favorite old sable dog—he had been left home to-night—came scratching and whining at the kitchen door, dragging a smashed foreleg.

A few more tense minutes, and both Wagonwheel and Louie had joined the central house group. Things were getting too hot out on the circumference of the fight. Already the brand had been carried this side the road.

"Fight," however, was not precisely the word for the engagement, either. The sheepherders studiously refrained from shooting. It appeared they had come simply to burn; and burn they did, with an exemplary thoroughness.

A second square remnant of haystack jutted between road and house; and in due course this, too, went up, like the proverbial tinder, in a column of mad aërial sparks. Other flames rose more leisurely out of stable

and tool shed. Then the bunk house caught. Drift's pessimism of outlook was proving soundly based. The finale now, the tug of war, could be only a matter of ticks.

There was an excellent free-flowing pump in the kitchen, and this counted for something. Also the house had a compact dirt roof, new-repaired. The four hale men pumped and relayed and sluiced water from within wherever the walls seemed most in danger. Drift and Jinny maintained incessant watch.

To the north, east and west, the ranch homestead, comfortable and well planned, was pierced by a plentiful supply of doors and windows. The south wall alone had neither; no opening in it of any sort. This was a completely blank side, facing the bunk house and serving as end wall to the rather dark pantry and storeroom. To-night Alec and his garrison crew had at once, naturally, gouged out holes between the shoulder-high logs. But, even so, here remained a distinctly more difficult front to defend than any of the other three.

Drift, with a couple of revolvers—for the shooting range would be short—chiefly devoted himself through the crisis to these pantry loopholes. The heat from the burning bunk house made it necessary to keep the wall flushed with water all the time.

Then a scream from Jinny brought everybody on the race to the living room.

Green Bow house was oblong in shape, its greater axis lying north and south, with the kitchen protruding at right angles from the southern extremity in an L toward the west. The living room occupied the northern extremity of the main oblong. Looking west from these windows, Jinny could command the brisk regular ascent which ran from the margin of the meadow all the way up past road and erstwhile stock sheds to the pair of small sentinel hills that bounded the vista. The hills themselves were fairly close in; not above five hundred yards, to their feet. Hardy sagebrush grew everywhere on this aspect, down to the very outworks of the ranch.

Peering up into the quarter where the familiar sheds and corrals had at sundown stood, the girl, on a moment, perceived a huge bonfire to spring out of the lurid welter of smoke and streaky gloom. Her eyes should by now have been accustomed enough to the sight of bonfires. But this latest one —no, that was not like any of the others! It didn't stay stationary. Mercy! It moved, it began to trundle evenly toward her. She screamed! Yes, it was coming, the horrid mobile bonfire—coming straight for the house, headed so as just to miss the corner of the kithcen L!

The five bedeviled men, arriving beside her, saw the mystery. They did not scream, but the hearts in the breasts of all of them tightened.

There was no mystery, really. The sheep-herders had happened to find the old ranch wagon, with a hayrack already placed to their purpose on its bolsters. That ample bed they had, under quick inspiration, proceeded to heap with hay and wood; had trained and fixed the wagon's tongue; had then discreetly fired the pile, and set the wheels smartly going down the declivity toward the house.

Brilliantly akindle, the wheeled shell of bonfire rolled steadily down the slope, fanning itself into incandescence by the gradual acceleration of its own speed. A Gargantuan flambeau, it struck the wall of the living room true, a trifle north of the kitchen, with a swirling bump; and lodged in that corner, where the flames could play at will over both main structure and L.

At any cost, the accursed contraption must be pushed away. All five of the drawn men tumbled in a knot for the door. But, as they flung it wide, an instant shower of lead thudded into the logs and planks about them.

Nobody got a scratch. Here, though, was the gun battle Green Bow had known must ultimately come. And it amounted to much more than vague warning. The light directly about the house was bright as day. In fact, they had reached the crux. To venture a foot out there toward that incendiary wagon spelled certain death.

As the five dodged back, debating some rapid ways and means, a series of terrific explosions seemed to be ripping the house into splinters behind them. When the rock of the floor had eased, they rushed for the pantry, only to discover that the blank south wall was virtually gone. Not merely had the sheep-herders seized on the hay-wagon diversion to plant powder under those logs; they had also manifestly availed themselves of the barrel and odd cans of Green Bow oil which had been stored in the tool shed. All the southern end of the house blazed.

This, on top of the raging wheeled torch

in the other corner! No, the buildings could not be defended. Everybody realized at a glance the game was up.

"Well, well, boys," said Alec quietly. "All right, we'll go." He clutched Jinny by the elbows and thrust her toward her bedroom. "Get any of your little treasures, darling. I have some papers I must save."

When at length they went out of the furnace of a house, it was on the east side, toward the meadow, into the dry irrigating ditch. No bullets sought to intercept them. Safely, all six, they crawled the few spark-strewn yards and settled down behind their shallow earthen bulwark.

Once secure in this unburning cover Drift, who had scarcely the chest for crawling, came to a grateful pause beside Jinny. Alec and the other boys, on the contrary, promptly began to explore, north and south, along the entire line of the ditch. The house flames made capital light. Shooting would continue to be at least passable for some stretch of minutes.

Only, by the time the garrison had got thus strategically deployed, not a soul except themselves seemed left on the place. The sheep-herders weren't lingering any to celebrate. Having polished off their firebrand job, they had without ostentation "vamosed."

CHAPTER XXI.

Out in the hill ravine, the curious thing about Elijah Riggs was that he never quite lost consciousness.

Again and again he came within an ace of it, yet never wholly did he slip across the edge. He seemed to himself to be full of bullet holes. He knew he was going to die. But also he had the strongest possible conviction that he would not die for a little while; not till he had had time to do a bit of a stroke for the old ranch and himself. This was the passion which now obsessed the man, against faintness, against his dread agony, against all the wastage of his blood. Simply, he must live long enough to be able to give the sheep-herders something to remember him by—Memorial Day, a day devoted to memories.

Lige calmly reasoned the case. By every human denotement, he would float out into the mists of eternity on the same general tide with Leo Staten. Well, he wanted to have something to tell Staten out in the final dark, there. He wanted to empty these two barrels of his duck gun before he went. He heard the sheep-herders ride by him in their debouchment from the ravine. But they were plainly beyond reach of his BB shot; and, moreover, he couldn't have pulled himself sufficiently together for firing just yet.

The nice cavity of his badger burrow, together with its scarped inner mound of earth, had shielded him from the herders' volley to a very respectable minimum. For example, his head seemed untouched. In his body, of course, was a raft of wounds, perhaps superficial, perhaps not. But his legs, his legs! From the hips down, he was riddled. Well, that didn't matter. When you died, you died, whether with bullet holes in you or disease, whether by disaster above the waist or below. However, to the present, he was still able to breathe all right.

And his arms were fairly good, too. He tested the weight of the shotgun, and found he could shift it about. His heart leaped. Why, this was bully! For he didn't have to load. He had done that minutes ago, before the herders' blast.

His first idea was to crawl toward the creek. But he had soon to give such wild projects up. The creek was three-quarters of a mile away. If Mohammed could not go to the mountain for his bit of a stroke, would the mountain, by any stretch of circumstances, come to him? In short, would the sheep-herders stop back here on their return to see if he were dead?

Whereupon Lige's mind took a jump, and he recollected the other sagebush, twenty yards back and to the north. There was the carcass of a boy sprawled out under that bush. Or there had been. Assuming it still to remain in the ghastly place, surely the crooks would stop to pick up the body of one of their own gang!

Very, very slowly, with infinite toil and care and anguish, he contrived to drag himself the twenty yards across to that other bush. Only, when he got there, to discover the space under it empty, the ground unencumbered by any carcass. The junior Green Bow man rested flat on his face and deliberated again. This scratching about over the ground—he could do no more than a certain limited amount of it. And he would need some strength at the end, for the effort of shooting.

The event had narrowed down at last to a pure gamble. He would have to stake every-

thing on another guess. Heaven send him savvy, and send him courage, and enough strength!

Long Ravine did not lie directly across from the ranch house. It was farther to the south. Which meant, in effect, that persons coming from the house would automatically be apt to enter in here at the nearest or northern point of the wide-jawed opening. Lige perfectly remembered the fact of the herders, when they had gone out, having detoured round him to the south. But this was because, in their rush, they had cherished some wholesome fear of his gun. Of course, they might still be fearing his gun on their return, and so follow the same guarded and roundabout trail of their exit.

The odds, though, were all against that. By now the crooks must reckon him good and dead. Instinctively they would seek to go home by the shortest cut, especially if they were in a hurry. Yes, Riggs figured, they would most probably just take a chance on him and sneak in here at the nearest point of opening. Anyway, obviously, he had to take a chance on *them*.

Heaven send him the gambler's hunch! Slowly, slowly again, to the beat of the ever-increasing drum of his familiar anguish, the little ex-watchmaker launched into the concluding stage of his last journey on earth, northward, toward the dwindling promontory of rocks which bounded the flare of ravine on that side.

It would be futile to attempt to detail the vicissitudes and torments of this brief progress on the belly. No expedition to the pole was ever so interminable or so beset by prodigies of hardship. Each yard, each straining foot, and Lige must come to a dead halt, for protracted spells of breathing and readjustment. But, irrespective of the gambling savvy he had prayed for, his strength and courage carried through. The crawler achieved his goal.

Meantime, he was quite aware of the drama of conflict being played with such vividness across at the house. He heard the intermittent crackle of shooting, saw the high glow of flames in the sky. These phenomena, however, could not be allowed to disturb or distract him. All that was out of his province. He had only the one object to keep before his reeling brain and flaccid muscles. Two ten-gauge BB shells inclosed his horizon.

Nor did he offer complaint. This was getting down to the fundamental simplicities. His grim soul, if not his bloodless lips, smiled. He feebly pushed the shotgun ahead of him in among the sharp and broken rocks. To screen his position he did not in the least try. Merely, he had to select a stone of suitable height on which he could support the gun. That once arranged to his satisfaction, he settled down with a sigh of profound content.

Already the big powder and oil explosions over at the house had flung up their gorgeous signal banners into the black dome. Lige was still able to compute that there could not be sufficient fuel on the place to feed these glutting flames much longer. The herders should soon be taking to the back track.

As, in truth, they at this moment were. First on foot, then in the saddle, tranquilized by the consciousness of an awkward evening's work competently performed, Joe Slater was now briskly driving his raid outfit home before him to the comfort of their own barns and bunk houses. They had earned—the boys—some hours of just sleep. Seven miles of foothill range, though, yet lay between them and their beckoning beds.

From his harsher bed among the stones, Riggs caught the considerable noise of their coming, and his interior smile deepened. Very carefully he cocked both hammers of his gun. For his estimate of the ranch burners' course was all that a gambler could have wished. He had sensed the instinct of primitive man aright. These laddybucks were going to hug his northern point of the ravine.

On their part, even in the triumphant mood of their return progress, the raid crew did not utterly fail to take the unknown Green Bow scout they had earlier ambushed over here into some consideration. But—what of him, the fellow with his accursed shotgun? Joe's band felt virtuously that they had treated him according to his stubborn and savage deserts. He must easily be done for. No sign of any sort had come from him during their extended operations at the house. Sure! He ought at present to be too cold dead ever to stampede into folks' little affairs again.

Besides, at the worst, his sagebush was not so far from the middle of the ravine mouth. "Keep tight up against the rocks to the left," rapped out the colorless voice of Boss Slater.

Among the score of them, they had two men variously nicked by the house defense, one in the arm, another in the leg. Both, however, could ride without help. The body of their single downed boy was cached up in the cove where their horses had been held while they sprung the trap on Lige.

Now they were spurring along east at a smart lope, the whole bunched cavalcade of them, silent but for the pounding of their cayuses' feet. They would be past Riggs in a jiffy. He must look alive and make no mistake. Tilting the gun so that his BB shot would just clear the ponies' withers, he drew the shaped stock in against his shoulder as firmly as he could. When the ghostly dim starshine in front of him seemed solid with the torsos of swaying horsemen, he pulled both triggers.

The recoil of the heavily loaded duck gun must certainly have broken the top of his shoulder. But he didn't bother much about that, Elijah Riggs. He didn't bother much about anything now. He could swoon in peace—and so, instantly, he was gone.

To the accompaniment of screams of sheep-herder pain and howls of sheep-herder rage, a second fusillade of bullets rattled in among the rocks about him. One struck him alongside the head, another fair in the neck. He didn't mind their shock. Such material trifles were no longer for the spiritual amplitude of Elijah Riggs.

Memorial Day. Yes, he would be ready now to discuss things out in the eternal mists with Leo Staten.

CHAPTER XXII.

As before, those over at the house—no, those crouched in the dry irrigating ditch over by the flamboyant ruins—they heard the dull double boom of the ten gauge. Even plainer than before, they heard it. To make the parallel of the two shotgun reports complete, the acuter rifle salvo again followed in due course. Would Lige be able to survive this later broadside, as evidently he had the first? That, with all else, lay fast hid in the mysterious cave of the future.

Once more, as befitted the rôle of surgical patient, Drift Weir sprawled at ease, smoking his intently speculative cigarette. While Alec and Wagonwheel and Dixie and Louie Lilyard yet reconnoitered, up the ditch and down, the big wounded cowboy, flat on his back, remarked the stars and blew voluminous wavy rings. Jinny Hailton, in her characteristic attitude of girlish despair—face buried in pointed knees, hands clasped about ankles—sat hunched close beside him. She had not stirred for minutes.

Drift, to do him justice, rather failed of confining his attention strictly to stars and smoke wreaths. In and out of Jinny's web of thick brown hair the flickering light of the great house bonfire played bewitchingly. They said this alkali-dust Western climate was awful hard on a woman's hair. It sure didn't seem to have got in at young Jinny Hailton any, so far as you could notice—God Almighty—to touch those coils of fire-shot hair! Abruptly the blond giant in the ditch bottom shivered and flipped away his cigarette end.

"Jinny," he burst out, "why ever did you throw your arms around that fellow's neck in the town hall the other night?"

She lifted her head and turned and looked slowly down at him. In the fierce radiance of the snapping flames, her eyes, sunken under terrified brows, were tragic and dark. "What does it matter?" she asked.

"To *me?* You'd better believe it matters a whole hell of a sight to me! The burning of no ranch house ain't a circumstance to it. Nor any little old cattle and sheep feud. They don't stand ace-high."

"Well. I did it because it was the only thing I had time to do."

"But *why?* I can't understand, Jinny. Except for one reason, of course. It wasn't natural—you—who always keep yourself so particular and clear and offish with everybody! Why ever did you want to go and do a blasted thing like that?"

"I had to do something. I couldn't faint, could I? Or perhaps you imagine I was crazy to have the murdering begin right then and there, under my nose, to entertain me?"

"Maybe, all the same, that mightn't have been such a bad plan. To have the showdown begin right then and there."

"It would have been a bad plan for me. And for you, if you ever had any idea of trying to come near me again."

"I savvy the gore and all wouldn't have been nice. I ain't aiming to say that. But the lives of good men—they might have been saved."

"You weren't thinking of the lives of good men. You were seeing red on your own brutal and selfish account." She gazed at the fire. "And nothing, either, could have

stopped this. It was too deep down, too far along."

Drift, the phlegmatic, paused for a painful steadying breath. "Missy, listen! You ain't stuck on that young Bernhardt fellow? Tell me straight, Jinny, for the blessed mercy of Heaven! I can bear it, if you tell me. You ain't stuck on him the teeniest mite, none at all?"

"What I did in the town hall night before last, I'd have done for anybody. I'd have *had* to. For Leo Staten himself."

"Jinny. Don't mind me. I've been in worse flames than this here house."

"You needn't have been. Not for my sake."

"And yesterday, over there—in spite of all his lying and crawling, young Bernhardt—you wouldn't let him cache himself away inside your wikiup?"

"You seem to know."

The puncher, relaxing, expelled the air from his huge bellows of lungs with a beatific sigh. "I reckon you're plenty wrong there, Jinny. I can deal with the games I'm used to. When they're dead open and shut, I mean, and I'm onto the rules. But I don't seem to know the first move in a girl's system. I'd just go moping and sweating around that a way, eating my blame-fool heart out." He squirmed an appealing inch through sand and clay toward her. "No, by gracious! You sure have to *tell* me, Jinny—what's what, all regular and shipshape. Or I'd never be able to see through you."

Unimpressed by the naïve hypocrisy into which his relief had swept him, the daughter of these murky ruins again buried her somber face in her knees. Drift did not attempt to disturb her. Twisting another cigarette, he happily resumed his observation of the wonders of wheeling stars, as complicated by the minor earthy wonders of fire-lighted brown hair.

Soon Alec and the three others had returned to ditch headquarters, with the certainty that not a sheep-herder remained this side the creek. All six of the routed house garrison now stood upright on their feet. The last log wall of the sitting room, reënforced as it was by fireplace and chimney, crumbled and fell inward with a thud. Tall and cascading, the inevitable splash of sparks adorned the sky. After which, the fury of the flames quickly abated, flattening in crisp, sullen waves.

"Well, boss?" inquired Drift of Hailton. "What next?"

The senior Green Bow partner made several efforts to speak before words came. His voice then was weary and unfamiliar and thin. Nevertheless, below the sense of forced quietude, an absolutely sincere and adamantine quality lay at the root of the tone.

"I want everybody"—so Alec at length pronounced—"to do exactly what he or she thinks best."

"But *you*, man? You yourself?"

"There's only one possibility for me. I stay on the ranch."

With a cry, mingled of many and opposite emotions, Jinny ran and cast herself on her father's breast; where, once his arms had folded her, she began to weep, normal and vehement. Drift, happening to glance down his front, tried to pull the edges of the unseemly gap in his shirts more decorously together. "I reckon, sir," he stated to Hailton, "that's what you do, we do. Hey, boys?"

"That's us, all O. K.," chimed Wagonwheel and Dixie and Louie.

Tenderly, if mechanically, Alec was patting Jinny's convulsed shoulder. "Thank you," he said. "I suggest, then, that two of you raise the valley. One go up, the other down."

The boys shuffled in their tracks, groaned. Not a horse—not a horse!

"For my part," Hailton went on, "I've got to know something about Lige."

"But what if the herders are still skulking in the cover over there?" sobbed Jinny.

"I don't believe they are. Slater isn't trying to kill us, especially, it seems. Only incidentally. He's proved that to-night. One of the boys can go with me, though, if you'd feel more comfortable." He looked at his watch. "Half past twelve. We shan't have long to wait now for the light. Drift, I depend most on you. Stick right here. Camp down by our few traps and guard Jinny."

This simple procedure they briefly followed. Dixie trudged manfully away up the valley road to the north. Wagonwheel disappeared south toward town. Alec, taking Louie with him, cautiously crossed meadow and crook, and headed through the sage for the hills. Jinny and Drift, in their fashion, tended ranch. That is to say, during all the rest of the cool winelike night, they fed a little cheering fire with the charred butts of logs.

Presently, however, Alec and Louie straggled back from beyond the creek, their hands unfreighted by any object except their guns. With all the good will, they had been totally unable to pick up trace of Riggs in the dark. If they could have mustered a dog's nose to help them —

But Green Bow now did not even sport a dog. The one only survivor of the raid prelude—Lige's poor old sable Danny, with his smashed foreleg—had compassionately been put out of misery. Silently, then, Alec and Louie rejoined the pair at the house fire. So the May night wore on.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Well, before daylight, though, the nearer ranchmen and cowboys began to assemble on the place, coming from both ways of the valley. In loose and untidy squads they rode, swinging rapidly along, hard-eyed, bitter, blasphemous; it might be two or three riders to the squad, it might be a dozen. All were loaded down with arms. Likewise, packs of strong-jawed mongrel dogs loped ahead or behind, snarling and warring among themselves. A bad note was in the air; viciousness, very personal and direct.

With the first peep of dawn, a large search party started out to beat the flat and ravines for Elijah Riggs; and promptly, of course, with the aid of their dogs, caught the body up in the meshes of that far-flung net. It was a horridly torn and mutilated relic which they thus retrieved in the gray light, showing by graphic souvenir the storms of lead it had withstood, and stiffened in an uncouth posture. Not a pretty or ingratiating or heroic corpse for display purposes. Yet, nobody could reasonably have quarreled with the expression on the dead man's face. Despite grizzled beard and early years of dissipation, this was of a singular innocence and childlike felicity.

Meantime, astride a borrowed pony, Louie Lilyard was out in the hills, getting up the ranch saddle band. Quite unmolested, yelling his thick Swedish delight at the prospect, cook brought the little bunch of Hailton and Riggs cayuses, including Trix, smashing in across the creek, they shying and sniffing at the unfamilar piles of discolored ashes they must tread among. A bit of rope patching, and the upper corral was made sufficiently tight to hold them. Everybody now had mounts and to spare, though not saddles. Lige's rig, to be sure, on Trix, was saved. For the rest, the whole Green Row outfit of nine saddles had been piled in the stable lobby, which meant that they were irreparably gone. But saddles could be ignored, at a pinch—at a very great pinch!

Among the latest of the valley rear guard to report at the fire were Dixie Lewis and Wagonwheel Sims. They had able borrowed horses under them, and were in excellent average fettle, notwithstanding that they had walked and ridden, between them, every inch of a hundred miles during the night. Also must they have told their diverting tale many times along the road; for, more than tired, they seemed talked out. Wagonwheel had pushed right in to the edge of town, being very particular, though, to avoid rousing any awkward persons who might pass on the word to Sheriff Jenks. It was after seven when Dixie arrived.

"Well, boys," proposed "Mulberry" Ray then. "Let's go. I got a busy day before me."

"Same here," George Freemont agreed. "And if we can't turn this trick with forty men, I expect we couldn't with a hundred."

"Sure thing, sure thing!" said a dozen voices.

"Besides, Buffalo's liable to hear the news and come surging straight along with a posse any minute"—that was from "Half-hitch" Jesse Clewton.

Nobody offered a sign of demurrer. On the contrary, everybody sprang relievedly to action; and from the rope-patched corral the little army jangled briskly away toward the eastward hills. It was an army without banners. But, to compensate for that, it had plenty of fanged dogs. Mulberry Ray served as impromptu captain. Using Lige's saddle off Trix, Alec rode his whitish horse Gabe. Only Louie, of the burned-out Green Bow people, was forced to the ignominy of the bareback. Wagonwheel and Dixie had their loan equipments. As for Drift and Jinny—again these two were left behind, to tend camp.

Sinister and swaying, buttressed by that pack of motley dogs, the frontier cavalcade had briefly disappeared from Drift and Jinny's ken. Across meadow, across sagebrush flat, through Long Ravine, into Winding Coulee, round the foot of Crown Butte—it was a stereotyped march for most of the stockmen. They had nearly all ridden this range before the advent of sheep.

Yet now they went very warily indeed, the main body preceded by scouts on either hand, taking every precaution against ambush. But, if careful, the progress lost nothing in steadiness and speed. No resistance cropped up anywhere. Evidently Slater hadn't anticipated so quick a counter.

First blood flowed—innocent first blood—when, in the coulee, the grim troop ran full against a huge flock of sheep. At sight and sound and smell of those teeming thousands of ewes and lambs, the horse and cattle people seemed to go clean off their heads. Old pent-up lusts of hate and revolt blazed forth. With howls of joy, with fearsome oaths of rage, the vengeance committee clapped spurs to ponies, urging the cruel dogs on in front—wolfish dogs which, in truth, needed small urging!

Slater's herder, seeing what was coming, squandered not an instant in burning up the ground for home. Even his collie deserted the helpless woolly band. A lively spatter of shots followed the retreating pair, but already they had won too far away, were going too fast. None of the bullets took effect.

So there blatted and stared the hordes of stupid soft sheep, at the mercy of brains and fangs as merciless as primal Nature herself.

For twenty minutes the carnage was beastly, atrocious.

Then the jangling cavalcade of picturesque men moved swiftly forward again, whistling on their dogs, which followed, weary yet reluctant, with dripping jaws. Such sheep and lambs as were not strewn gorily about on the coulee bottom had been scattered wide to the coyotes in the hills.

Thus the work of reprisal began. Perhaps the balance of the morning may be judged by this sample. It was a violent and crowded couple of hours, unforgettable through some span of years to all who took part in them.

At the Staten, Barr & Brinker house the herders, for a while, put up a stiff enough defensive fight. But no stand that they could make was of avail against the spirit which confronted them. As at Green Bow in the night, so here now under the broad eye of day, one after one, the log ranch buildings melted down in hot ashes. Many pliers cut and slashed the surrounding lines of barbed-wire fence. By noon, not a stick of any sort reared itself above the level of the marred earth. The big home quarters of the Agate Valley Sheep Company was a waste.

By then, also, two more men had been killed, both members of the sheep forces. The second of the twain was important—no less a personage than Joe Slater himself. Joe, who did not lack for gameness, had in his desperation taken a chance, and lost. He could not deliberately have been trying to follow the great business man he so much admired off into the happy hunting grounds. Anyway, he went. But it wasn't by the route of accident.

Leaderless, the other herders soon gave up and fled, crawling into the sagebrush, finding cover wherever and as best they might.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Four days ago, on his innocent travels from the Candlestick Ranch to Duncan's, Drift Weir, round-up boss, had happened to drop in at a certain corner of Green Bow; a merely informal social call. That same night, in Burnt Robe, no longer round-up boss, he had extemporaneously become chief wrangler of a Dakota drive outfit. Next night he in turn proceeded to lose this job, together, for a time, with his senses. Last evening it was again something else; a gang of morose gentlemen who had insisted on setting fire to the house over his invalided head.

Now another peaceful vernal dusk was drawing down. What, ruminated Drift, should he look forward to on the present occasion? He did hope the ensuing hours, customarily wasted in sleep, mightn't prove dull to anybody.

At the moment of these grave meditations, Mr. Weir was perched high on the summit of Crown Butte, watching Louie Lilyard and Jinny Hailton build camp. They would not allow him to help at all; so he just leaned with his back lazily against a convenient pine log and told over his recent assortment of blessings and defaults.

On the whole, he wasn't dissatisfied with the show made by the blessings. Chaos now reigned in the valley, and it would indeed be a giddy person who ventured to count on anything farther than two rods away. Still, no matter for that. At least he was contriving to hold mighty close beside his young Jinny—praise be to the foxy gods of chance! Let the future rip. He hadn't been separated from Jinny Hailton since—why, when?—not since first daylight yesterday morning! Thirty-six heavenly hours!

Moreover, only a few minutes ago, while riding out here from the meadow to the butte, he had been struck by a sudden idea. And—suffering jew's-harp, *what* an idea! It was in one fell swoop a solution of the entire Green Bow problem. But likewise was it a concept so startlingly original and topsy-turvy in character that all Drift's common foundations of instinct shook under the strange slant. *Him,* at his age? As wild a shift as that—a flop!

After the burning of the Staten, Barr & Brinker ranch buildings, and the bizarre orgies of ravage among the sheep, the horse and cattle avengers had quickly dispersed. Without waiting to ride back to the county road, they scattered discreetly, north and south, seeking their respective homes, in pursuit of their own pressing spring affairs. Alec Hailton, having now no pressing spring affairs, returned leisurely to the Green Bow ruins. Wagonwheel, Dixie, and Louie were still with him, though Dixie had got a slight wound on the hip in the morning's fray. Reaching the creek, the four let their horses drink.

"Hey!" warned Wagonwheel. "Buffalo!"

All switched eyes down the valey. Yes, another company of horsemen was just appearing on the scene, round the southern point of rocks. The Breed County sheriff at last, leading his band of officially neutral deputies.

Well, he had come too late. What could he do now—except collect the pieces!

That was all Mr. Jenks really tried to do. He had in fact been hard put to it in the recruiting of a posse. The Burnt Robe townspeople obviously did not wish to mix in the fateful business. Considerable time was lost. Perhaps, being himself distinctly human, Buffalo had not hurried overmuch. At any rate, when he arrived at Green Bow, the jig was fully up.

He conducted an examination, in the course of which Wagonwheel, Dixie, and Louie betrayed the profoundest ignorance of the events of the morning. Dixie couldn't even seem to remember exactly how he had received his wound.

Not so Alec Hailton. Alec frankly admitted friends had come to his aid, though he naturally divulged no names. And, beyond a sufficient routine form, Buffalo failed to persist.

The upshot was that the sheriff merely sent a rider down to Mulberry Ray's, the ranch next below, for a wagon. Alec must be hazed in to town. Likewise should Dixie go, for his wound's sake. Then there was Lige. Wagonwheel voted to stick along with Dixie, his "old side pardner;" and, to be sure, they all knew Drift Weir would be infinitely better off in the doctor's hands at Burnt Robe. Jinny's place was with her father. Which pretty well ticked off the list. As for Louie Lilyard, he didn't trouble anybody, especially. It could scarcely be reckoned important where Louie went.

So plans for deserting the ranch were made complete. While Buffalo settled the details, Alec Hailton lunged against the corral, silent and brooding.

Mulberry Ray and his cowboys had had plenty of opportunity to get home the back way before Buffalo's messenger lighted down on them; and the wagon, with an artless-eyed driver, was promptly forthcoming. The noon sun now drenched them all in brilliant warmth. Sheriff Jenks was just preparing to hustle the Green Bow people into the commandeered wagon, under a deputy guard, when Alec Hailton broke his somber quiet.

"Jinny," her father said. "I want you to stay on the ranch."

Recollecting the tireless minute of his care for the girl all these years, everybody blinked.

"But, you know, *you've* got to go in to the courthouse, Alec," explained Buffalo.

"I want you to stay on the ranch," Hailton reiterated to his daughter.

She stood a little bewilderedly beside him. "Alone, daddy?"

"Somebody must stay. Yes, alone, if need be. It's our home. Lige can't help any more. And Buffalo has to take me off to town for a bit. Who does that leave but you?"

"Jinny won't never have to stay anywhere alone," put in Drift Weir, "while *I'm* about the country!"

"You ain't got your health, though, Drift," Mr. Jenks reminded him.

"Because I laid up here last night and to-day? What does that signify? I had my reasons. I'd admire to see anybody present with a bigger stack of gilt-edge, man's-size health than I've got."

Buffalo shrugged and blew out his cheeks. "Suit yourself, son. Suit yourself."

"And me, too!" protested Louie. "I stay cold on das ranch. You bet!"

Hailton nodded to the Swede boy. "Fine fellow!" Then, turning to Drift: "This

means a lot of trust, a lot of responsibility. You're quite willing to shoulder it?"

"*Am* I?" huskily muttered the whaling bronchobuster. . .

After a pause, Alec twitched decisive fingers across his brow. "Well, that's all right," he said. "I don't ask if you're up to it. We're none of us up to the things we have to do." He broadened his tone so as to include the whole party. "I had to quit my other home in the East, my childhood's home, because of injustice. But there I was on the bad side, among the workers of the injustice. I belonged to the corrupt and privileged little clique who held the whip hand. I could run then, without shame. What I couldn't alter, I could at least quit.

"Now I can't run. I'm the under dog now. I *won't* run! More than six years ago, I came away to this far frontier, hoping in the virgin land to find a new openness between man and man, a new honesty. And I have found—what you see to-day! Horror and hate. Nevertheless, I warn you. I shall fight, and go on fighting, to the last ditch. If I had needed lesson, Lige has set it for me.

"But I needed no lesson. Here is my true home, the home of my manhood, made with my own hands, carved out of the wilderness and paid for in love and anxiety and sweat. It should be my daughter's home. I, anyway, shall seek no other on earth. When I quit here, it will be to quit everything, for keeps. To follow beyond with Lige."

The declaration, low-pitched and unimpassioned, created a breathless hush about the corral. Drift, cumbrously climbing up from the ground, smashed into it.

"That's sure the tune I like to hear a man talk! Alec, you ain't kissed this valley adios yet. Not by one hell of a jump!"

Hailton looked his thanks. "I'm afraid, though, I've kissed the Barrensen roans adios. Buffalo, I must just throw them back on you, neck and crop. How about Jared Crossett? I believe, under the circumstances, he'd step in at a word. He as much as told me so yesterday."

Mr. Jenks twisted and raked smooth his sandy forked beard without comment. He had first, he stated, to ride over to the other ruins, behind the butte.

Wherefore, when the sheriff's squad duly divided up, some to go with Alec, Dixie, Wagonwheel, and Lige's body back to town, others faring on with Buffalo over to the sheep ranch, Jinny, Drift, and Louie remained on Green Bow. Or, rather, it was not precisely on Green Bow they remained. That would have been a trifle too foolhardy. They took to the butte.

True, Crown Butte lay measurably nearer the wide sheep premises than did the Hailton and Riggs ranch site proper. But, being this single lonely peak, it offered a superb view of the entire valley roundabout, was difficult to win to, more difficult to surprise, and relatively easy to defend. It had a spacious lusty cap of timber on its very top, haunted by grouse. There was at this height, unfortunately, one crucial camp defect—no water.

However, the three from Green Bow could pack their water in a milk can. They would not require much for cooking. And in anything short of actual siege, which was now most unlikely, they counted on traveling up and down the butte at will, on their horses.

Nobody did, in fact, disturb them. They used the few traps which had been tossed out of doors and saved from the Green Bow fire; enough blankets for beds, and a couple of pots and pans. Late in the afternoon Jinny shot some birds for supper; and, as dark came on, built herself a little lean-to sleeping shelter, apart. Over the camp fire, cook Louie sang and guffawed and chattered. Drift, couched on the pine-needle-littered ground, watched Jinny whenever she was in sight, smoked and revolved his famous radical idea.

After supper the girl took another peep at her patient's wound—she had already dressed it earlier in the day—then went off to her separate lodge. Drift and Louie rolled up about the fire. There befell no interruption from the outside at all during this night, yet the big cowboy absolutely could not sleep for the insistence of his thinking.

CHAPTER XXV.

Meantime, history records the ferment in town, with Leo Staten lying dark and aloof in the parlor of his ornamental brick house on lower Frisco Street. The notable bricks for that house had been freighted in from Helena by ox team. Also history briefly mentions the name of Paul Bernhardt.

Paul had not, by and large, been having too nice a session of it. On his return to Burnt Robe with his uncle's remains yesterday noon, he was, to be sure, almost at once

able to discover how solidly entrenched he stood in the Staten will. And the thing was so good—the boy could scarce have asked better. Therefore, without waiting to consult Barr, or to consult anybody, he proved his new power by just quickly and quietly dispatching a rider out to Slater at the ranch. Rapidity of movement, he had no trouble in convincing himself, was the alpha and omega of his strategy. He would take the bull by the horns, and argue the case later. It might be called the Frederick-the-Great system. Paul's message to Slater consisted of a single word: "To-night."

Then came the fast-following developments. To begin with, on the positive side, report of the startling and completely successful attack against Green Bow. But, even to qualify this, was the item of Lige's incidental havoc wrought on the herders in the hills.

And afterward—that ghastly negative afterward! The rising of the horse and cattle people, the firing of the sheep company's buildings, the scatterment and harassing of the flocks, the death of Slater!

These were stiff blows. If Hailton and Riggs had on more than one occasion been guilty of poor judgment, here, to offset them, was folly carried to the point of high catastrophe. Burnt Robe overflowed with dead and wounded. In the former category alone, the sheepmen's toll was unheard-of, as bad as wholesale massacre by Indians. Five in the rushing of the horse band—but they could not be charged to Paul—three in the by-the-way adventure with Riggs, two in that final effort to hold the key ranch behind the butte. Ten actual dead—including Staten and Slater!

And, moreover, as many wounded, at least half of them seriously. Lige's BB shot had sprayed the ravine riders with most telling adequacy. A score of men, on top of all the rout of the sheep!

Brinker arrived by buggy from the territorial capital on the morning of this first day of June; and, after the funerals, toward evening, he and Barr had a little exchange of civilities with Paul in Staten's private room at the back of the bank. What the two conservative and bitterly aggrieved commercial gentlemen said to young Bernhardt in the course of that conference, he would probably remember to the end of his life. Mrs. Staten was of no aid to anybody in the issue. A childless woman, she had been so effectually browbeaten for so many years by her heavy-handed lord and master, there was left in her neither mind nor spirit.

Paul went home from the bank, locked himself up and walked the floor all night long; biting his nails, cringing away from the tragedy he had brought tumbling down about his ears; raging, groaning, under the weight of humiliation and venom. His soul was sick. Instead of honest blood, liquid poison seemed pulsing in his arteries. Only one thought stayed him. The enemy likewise had suffered. Riggs was dead. Hailton utterly ruined.

And the girl? In town, too, this while, of necessity languished the man who had been ruined. Alec was submitting himself to county authority.

However, those tolerant courthouse guardians of law did not bear overhard on such a transgressor. They, no less than Paul Bernhardt, realized the desperation of Hailton's immediate straits, his bleakness of prospect. On the sworn assurance, therefore, that he could be found always at his ranch, judge, and coroner dismissed him, virtually with their blessings.

Old Jared Crossett, naturally on deck in Burnt Robe, snapping to and fro in the thick of affairs, promptly agreed to take over the Hailton and Riggs contract with Mrs. Barrensen. The redoubtable Double K roans, still at present uncaught, were certainly being bandied about.

So Alec Hailton, now, was again entirely free. He had had Lige's body put in a fitting casket; and early next morning, the morning of the second of June, he gathered up the Methodist minister and Doctor Satterly, and started back in Mulberry Ray's wagon to Green Bow. He was burying Lige on the summit of Crown Butte.

Besides their own small party, a few hastily assembled ranch people witnessed the simple and touching ceremony. Afterward, Drift Weir could barely wait for the doctor to finish his dressing, and for everybody to clear out.

When the visitors had at length all departed down the butte, though, big Drift was worse off than before. He didn't in the slightest know how to go about broaching his subject to Alec.

"Boss," he began, "I want you to hop right onto a pony and travel over to Grand Falls."

Hailton stared. Drift had led him a few

rods aside out of camp, and awkwardly sat down on a ledge of rock. They could from here plainly distinguish the bold mound of Lige's grave.

"Or, that is," the cowboy hurriedly went on, "I don't want you to hit the road none till I've had a piece of a powwow with you. But then, if you see this here layout as I do, you can't move too sudden."

"And what am I to see?" inquired Alec. His manner was not repellent, not impolite. Yet only by some considerable stretch of courtesy could it have been named interested.

"Why," Drift replied, fumbling but dogged, a strong flush under his tan, "I want you to see sheep."

Again Hailton turned and stared. "I thought I *had* been seeing a rather good deal of sheep lately."

"Not from the angle I mean, though, Alec. My game is to try to make you see 'em from a brand-new slant."

"Now, what the perdition are you driving at?" demanded the cattleman.

"Alec, have you got any plan fixed for yourself?"

"No, not yet."

"All right. I have. I've got one for you. And I break into it, too, on the same shake."

"And what is this plan?"

Drift grinned with embarrassment. "What I just now said. Sheep. I'm aiming for you and me and some other folks I know to light into raising sheep."

Alec also half smiled, indulgently, and drew out his handkerchief, and wiped his ascetic-lined face. "Doctor Satterly didn't mention anything about your having fever to-day, did he?"

"This ain't fever," declared Drift. "I don't deny I maybe *am* a mite flustered. But it's just regular straight-out flurry, not fever. I almost never slept a wink last night."

Hailton looked long and carefully at the apparent crazy man, then likewise sat down on a corner of the rock ledge. The first dimming of day's brilliance was now in the lovely June air. Drift, rolling a cigarette, nodded at Alec with satisfaction.

"I reckon," he stated, "that my people has always been hoss people, ever since I've had any. At least, as far back as there's been hosses. I always figured myself on breeding hosses, some time or other. And I might yet, at that. But listen, Alec. Though I'm so plumb prejudiced in favor of hosses, and though I ain't nohow a bright individual—my body being worth about seventy-five of my thinking outfit that a way—still, I got eyes and ears. And I've beat around over this country west of the Mississippi a tolerable lot, from the border up."

"Well?" suggested Hailton.

"Well, Alec, it's just this. Wherever I've been, working hosses, I've noticed that sheep always followed pretty close behind. And mostly the sheep chased the hosses out, in the end. They're dumb animals, sheep; sickly and soft. But, by God, they have a habit of sticking. I expect it's because they pay so rich. How about? They stick be-because wily old sharks like Leo Staten say they *got* to stick! Hot or cold, wet or dry."

Hailton blankly assented.

"That's that, then. Now, we ain't going to let ourselves discount the savvy of crooked sports like this here Staten person, Alec, are we, just because they go too far? *Are* we? Crook and everything, I allow Leo Staten had it all over me in smartness. I don't make no whimper of doubt he had. He was shrewd and brainy, could have whip-sawed me into a hole any hour of the day or night. And he was plenty more a practical, hard-headed devil than you are, too, Alec. Of course he was a crook besides. But I'm only talking now of his real, honest-to-God sharpness and ability as a business proposition."

Again Alec, brief and detached, agreed.

"All right. Leo Staten, being what he was, went in for sheep. And, being what he was, he overplayed his hand. To-night he's under sod. But I got old Texas friends located in Grand Falls, Alec, who were talking sheep to me inside the month. They're white men, and don't want to overplay no hand. They're just organizing to slip in with sheep on the Montana ground floor, and go along easy, you understand, dead on the level——

"Being so hell bent for poker, I never thought twice of their talk at the time. Now I ain't able to think much of anything else. I couldn't sleep last night. She's got me—the wool racket has.

"For this valley, Alec, won't put up no more fight against sheep. They're in the wind, they're bound to come. So why not you make up your mind to take the plunge and settle down with 'em? Cabell and Hood are on the watch over there in the Falls, just hunting around to cut the trail of such a bang-up chance to invest their money. I'd

stake a little bet you wouldn't meet with a frog's-hair of difficulty in showing your property and ideas to that pair of experienced southern stockmen." He blew a cloud of smoke toward the involved landscape behind the butte. "And don't you reckon Barr and Brinker would be almighty glad to sell out back here and quit Staten's blasted riots?"

"You mean," muttered Hailton, frowning, "to push squarely ahead with the original scheme of the Agate Valley Sheep Company? Including the centering on Green Bow as home ranch?"

Drift jumped up from the rock ledge with such violence as to bring a twist of pain to his mouth. "I do! I mean that, Alec! Only, with us owning and running the job, instead of the Staten crowd!"

"And buy in the sheep that are already here?"

"Sure! Why not? Wouldn't you expect Barr and Brinker might be liable to shove 'em out on the market at a sacrifice?"

Hailton bit his lip. "I see," he said. "It's ingenious."

Mr. Weir had had some twenty-four hours in which to accustom himself to the notion. Hence it no longer seemed particularly mad or revolutionary to him. He could argue on its essential soundness, logic and practicability with conviction.

An older man, skeptical and now made inexpressibly sad by the burial of his friend, Alec Hailton responded without enthusiasm. He had to be won round gradually, inch by inch. But, gradually, he did get used to Drift's strange thought. After a protracted canvass of pro and con out at the rock ledge, he and the cowboy turned back to camp, and invited Jinny into the parley. And, contrary to all presumption, the girl took this bewildering new shift of doctrine with next to no outcry, swiftly adjusting herself to it and giving Drift the frankest credit for his inspiration. She evidently grasped the solution of the ranch's ills at a pounce.

George Decker Weir was charmed to profoundest depth of soul. Did he for a moment dilate on the dangerous facility of Youth? Not likely!

Half the night they consulted and whispered about the camp fire. Then, in the morning, riding Lige's saddle on his whitish horse Gabe, Alec set out for Grand Falls. As he said good-by to the three at the butte, his scarred face was truly a study.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Several weeks crept by. Alec had avoided passing through Burnt Robe, either on the trail to Grand Falls or in his return. It was deemed a shade nicer policy to keep the journey as far as possible secret. However, in due course, Messrs. Richard T. Cabell and Jay Hood, until recently of the Panhandle of Texas, appeared by coach in the Breed County seat, and began almost at once to enter into a series of discreet negotiations with Barr and Brinker.

Paul Bernhardt did not figure in these negotiations. During their first unforgetable bank conference on the day of Staten's funeral, Barr and Brinker had grimly insisted that the dead partner's interests hereafter be represented by his lawyer, till a fair agreement of dissolution in the various company enterprises could be arrived at. Mrs. Staten and Paul must vote through this attorney. Already, at the end of two weeks, steps toward the break-up of the chain of Staten, Barr & Brinker partnerships were well advanced. Brinker wished to withdraw his money for mining investments, and neither he nor Barr would for an instant regard Paul in the light of his uncle's business successor.

Mrs. Staten had by now determined to go back East, to Chicago, to live there permanently. That settled her case.

But the other legatee, young Bernhardt? What of him? As yet, the boy simply didn't know. The poison of his failure and public abasement continued to eat like a cancer in him. He realized that everything decent in his fiber, everything warm and humane, was fast being corroded away. Nevertheless, he seemed utterly incapable of helping himself. He could only brood and sulk. The venom accumulated in his mind as it is said to accumulate in the tail of an imprisoned scorpion. And, as with the sickness of the scorpion, there was a single remedy.

Paul faced his cure, played fascinatedly with the idea of it. This morbidity of his could be dissipated, vented, in action. What kind of action? The drastic, the purgative. Stir, movement, energy. And, on top of that, a fulfillment—the drowning out of all his hidden springs of jealousy, hatred, and revenge. To act, act! And he had not budged foot across the sill of the house door in days.

So, while he was still quite in the air as to what direction his material future should

take, Paul came to the evening of mid-June when he ordered his pony saddled, and started off on a ride. At supper he told his timid aunt that he might jog rather a long-ish stretch—not to wait up for him. The night promised to be superb, with a full moon rising later. Mrs. Staten characteristically shook her head over the plan. But Paul explained he was going to see if exercise wouldn't do something toward straightening out his tangled affairs. He had tried every other means.

And, indeed, from the minute he cleared town, the boy felt better. Automatically, as it were, he pointed his sorrel paint pony into the familiar track, northward, up Agate Valley.

In at Burnt Robe, the Cabell and Hood venture was unquestionably looking brisk. During his protracted bout of Grand Falls discussion with the pair of southern sheepmen, Alec had got to like them very reasonably well; and, as Drift had so confidently predicted, they on their side were not loath to listen to the elaborate sketch of suggestion and proposal that Hailton had to offer. Their investigation of the lead was as prompt as the delicate circumstances would admit of, their decision to deal as forthright and unqualified. They had driven out to the ranches, and gone over the ground. But no open bond as yet existed between Green Bow and them.

Naturally, such a bond must soon come to be suspected; and there ensued a moment when Breed County stood erect on its hind legs, as Breed County itself would say, and gave a couple of amazed gasps. However, the land was at present far too busily engaged with stock in general to waste much dialectical vigor over any one particular item, no matter how extraordinary the involved breach of convention might on the surface appear.

As for Barr and Brinker, the rumor of fanciful coalitions out in Agate Valley meant nothing whatever to them. They were only very collaterally interested in live stock, and theoretically opposed to any feuds which interfered with the processes of trade. Their sole concern for the special instance in hand was to save as much money from the Staten sheep wreck as might be. Even if Paul Bernhardt had wished to block the sale, and he voiced absolutely no wish in the transaction, the merchant and the mining man would have overborne him.

Speaking for one citizen, George Decker Weir spent a merely enchanted fortnight. There were just no words to describe such felicity. Not that love-making went on at all between Jinny and Drift. Positively not. The girl tended her patient's slow-healing wound, and, while Alec was away, they sat through hours of intense friendly companionship; an intimacy—on Drift's part, at least—never totally free of a certain hush of breathlessness. Such luck did seem too good to be real. They hunted the scary rock grouse in the bull pines together or rode about or played cassino on a blanket. But of overt proffers of love, of caresses—none.

Jinny's state of mind might perhaps be indicated by a single token. She had gone back to the thought of her wikiup.

It was on the morning of Paul Bernhardt's resolution to act that Jinny actually got down to resuming work on her wikiup. The green of the cottonwoods and willows and aspens was still a vivid enough green, the wild flowers were even more plentiful than in May. She tore out entire sections of the withered brown mat of former decoration from the tepee poles, and added new. This would not be quite the same as three weeks ago, her "house cleaning," on the whole, was nothing like so thorough. Nevertheless, she had again a fragrant and refurbished sylvan bower which could give her distinct pleasure.

Drift had got his second saddle and both Jonah and Kelly from the Candlestick—the ponies would, of course, run to their home range—and he was, in consequence, by these times, a moderately ambulatory person. Now he leaned in his old lazy pose against the stem of an aspen tree half a dozen steps outside the wikiup yard, an infatuated grin on his otherwise firm, red lips, and watched Jinny at her work. A Winchester rifle rested slack across his knees. For his official status here was that of guard.

Toward evening, man and girl mounted their cayuses and climbed the butte. Jinny was keener and gayer of spirit than she had been since the far-off day of the dance, as capricious as a flame. She domineered over her hulking slave without scruple, careless and high-hearted. And he—how divinely he basked in that tyranny! Loafing and inviting his soul, good and right, was Mr. Drift Weir.

He should by all odds have slept deep this tired evening. But. homehow, he did not. It may have been that he was too happy.

The broad June moonlight struck into his eyes, and Louie's grouse stew for supper had been terrifically salty. About midnight, parched, Drift rolled out of his blankets for a drink, only to find the camp bucket as dry as his throat.

At length he became so thirsty and wide-awake that he concluded to get up and chase himself down to the valley for water. He wasn't supposed to pack water yet, but he could, at a pinch. And Jonah, on a picket rope, happened to be grazing in a little grassy park some slight distance below camp.

So the big cowboy quietly made his simple change from sleeping to daylight toilet, and took a milk can, and went out and caught up his pony and saddled. The moon still shone brilliantly, though dawn couldn't be more than an hour off.

Coming from Burnt Robe, toward what did Paul Bernhardt steer, then, in his Agate Valley riding of this night? The ranch behind Crown Butte?

Why should Paul seek to visit the ghastly ruins of that deserted place? Why, indeed?

The boy must be doing this romantic night riding of his own will and direction. Yet it seemed, too, as if some virulent power outside himself was presiding over the adventure.

When he had skirted Crown Butte to the south for a considerable arc, he dismounted and tied his horse to a sagebush in a screened wash. For the remainder of the route he walked, very cautious.

Jonah, grumpy but clever-footed, tacked skillfully down the west slope of the butte, till he had brought Drift to the ravine at its foot. The cowboy's original intention was to hold straight on over to the creek. Now, however, a new thought hit him. Jinny's bower in the moonlight!

He had dismounted and enjoyed his drink, and was standing in the midst of the grove, gazing rapturously at the little englamored cone of greenery, mystical and pallid and delicate in the last of the moonlight, when he heard a sound, and spied Paul Bernhardt warily edging down the draw from its top. Drift recognized the figure instantly, and he could also plainly catch the glint of an unsheathed revolver in Paul's right hand.

Except for the time of day, the conditions of the meeting were almost precisely identical with those of the former encounter between the two men here. Then it had been sunset. This morning, rather, it was the queenly moon which, in her descent, swam just abrim of the western cup of mountain, her white radiance thinning fast.

She vanished; and the brief interval of gray blackness before dawn ran pat to Drift's favor. Jonah, virtually covered, lurked in the shadow of a tree. However, the cowboy did not want to risk any mischance. Like a big lynx, he dropped down prone and began to crawl.

His breast, obviously, was still far from being the perfect surface for this style of locomotion. None the less, Drift flattened and crawled, a wide circuit. The idea was to avoid shooting. He asked only to get his hands on this persistent young pilgrim—Lothario. That was all—only his hands.

Into what the nature of Paul's designs were, it is not necessary to inquire. Drift didn't give him sufficient leeway to demonstrate them. Perhaps the town boy actually had no definite designs. Drift neglected to argue the point. He wormed near and near, stealthily crouched up behind a tree, and swooped. Paul, whirling, had space to shoot once. But the other was too close in for any effect. With a bludgeon thrust of arm, Drift knocked the revolver aside, and, in a rush, had Paul safe clamped to him.

The town boy struggled violently. And Drift? Had he all his wonted strength back yet? By no means, probably. However, it didn't matter. Even so, Paul was as wax in the giant's clenched fists. Neither of the pair of them spoke a word. Only, Paul's breath, as desperately he pitted himself against that ruthless bulk of whalebone opposite, came in irregular sobs.

For now, quietly and savagely, Drift was ripping the clothes off the young fellow's upper body. First the coat and waistcoat—the coat fairly whole—were down and trod into the dust under their surging feet. Then the collar and outer shirt. Inside shirt went the same rough road.

Which left Paul stripped to the middle in the morning chill. Not that the boy felt the cold, though. Great beads of sweat rolled down his flesh as Drift crushed him up in one banded arm. For, with his free hand, Mr. Weir was by this divesting himself of his own belt.

But as soon as he was satisfied with all the preliminary arrangements, Jinny's self-appointed protector invincibly pushed his

victim off to arm's length, the belt swished through the air and fell with a cruel thudding cut on Paul's naked back. Under the shock of that villainous keynote stripe, the town boy blanched and groaned. It was the single sign of weakness he betrayed throughout. Gripping Paul by one wrist, the puncher kept him always swung out to a nice distance, and the belt buckle rose and fell with remorseless rhythm.

Paul weakened quickly, his struggling grew less, again and again he sank to the earth. But each time Drift harshly hauled him up, and the steel-and-leather flail hacked a new welt in his lacerated skin. Drift's pretty strenuous arm exertion had, of course, torn his own wound, with the stitches still in it, wide open. However, he didn't let up in the beating till Paul could not stand on his feet. Then Drift finally released his hold, and young Bernhardt collapsed, unconscious, on the churned floor of the ravine.

Drift went to the rill at the north edge of the thicket, drank, and then took up what water he could bail in his hat, and emptied it into the can. When he had thus collected several hatfuls, he carried the can over to Paul and splashed the icy contents down on him. As Paul eventually revived, Drift without ceremony dragged him to his feet, and helped him into his coat. And now passed the only casual words of the episode.

"Well, so long," said Drift. "Better not linger. See you again some time."

CHAPTER XXVII.

With sunrise, Drift's absence from camp was, of course, duly discovered, and the absence of the water bucket. While Alec made fire, Jinny and Louie also took other pots and kettles and rode down to the creek for water. They did not encounter Drift. Jinny started Louie back up the hill ahead of her, and then luxuriously dabbled for fifteen minutes or so in the crystal Agate, washing herself and combing her hair.

It was a sore temptation to bathe in a screened bend of the creek this quiet June morning. She would love to. But she had never yet done that, and naturally she didn't dare let herself seriously consider the notion to-day. Life here was hardly secure enough for *such* flights! And where could Drift be?

At the wikiup, possibly? You couldn't tell, with a big blond softie like that. Anyway, it would do no harm just to have a peek in there.

She needed small provocation in any matter involving a trip to the wikiup. Swinging her kettle of water, she went. And, in fact, when she had loped up to the grove, there Mr. Weir was, calmly squatted on the gravelly earth, looking rather pale, grinning and swabbing at his interesting slashed pectoral muscles.

Jinny's own brown face blanched at sight of the state he was in. "Why," she cried, "what's happened now?"

Drift glared balefully, in a manner most unusual with him, toward Jonah. "Yonder's what happened," he said. "Ornery treacherous old Injun whelp! Blame if he didn't ketch me napping—me being so sickly and heedless and trusting that a way—and razzle me off."

"*Bucked* you clean off, do you mean? On to the ground?"

"It wasn't being bumped off that done this, though, Jinny. It was the stretching and straining, trying to stick on."

Jonah, a-drowse, bore the libel with sulky equanimity.

"You must have tried to stick on by hanging with your arms around his neck!" commented the lady bitingly. "Let me see."

When she had examined the wound, very professionally, she frowned. "You stay here. I'll hustle up to camp and get my dressing stuff, and some breakfast for you."

To which the patient agreed with cheerfulness. "Fine! That'll be dead all right."

"Then," continued Jinny, "in you go to town."

"But I don't want to go to town, Jinny," he protested.

"It's got past being a question of what you want."

His jaw squared doggedly. "Well, I won't go," he declared with heat.

"Very good." Miss Jinny clambered deftly, without spilling any of her water, on Trix's back. "I'll leave you out here, then. For *I'm* going in."

He had this to mull over while she was away up the butte. Presently she returned, her father with her. During one of her inevitable trances of distraction at the wikiup, Drift seized on a moment to whisper to Alec the true history of his reopened wound. Hailton stared, then laughed. He *could* laugh at the picture of the belt wielding now.

But, all the same, he thenceforward sided

energetically with his daughter in the plan of sending Drift to town. Jinny should drive him, and remain in there, under strict charge of Mrs. Aylward, till arrangements at the ranch were finally settled. Alec would listen to no argument. He himself at once rode off down to Mulberry Ray's for the wagon.

It was a considerable jaunt to Mulberry's and back, and some hours lapsed. Meantime, the sun, clearing the scoriac hills, beat down into the cavity of the wikiup draw with a fierce dry intensity. Not a wisp of air stirred, not a silver leaf fluttered. Overnight, almost before the memory of the snow had faded, summer was come.

Jinny, herself feeling the oppression of that vertical blaze, glanced critically about among the thin trees. "It's soon going to be too hot for you in here," she remarked.

"Oh, I don't reckon so," said the renewed invalid easily.

"Yes, it is." She looked uncertainly at him, flushed, put on an abrupt assumption of grave and weighty dignity. "Stand up."

"Sure. But why, missy?"

"Never mind why. Do as you're told." She ran to him, and from behind gayly slipped her hands under his arms. "Ugh, how heavy! Now, then. Up with you."

He resisted, cautioning her. "Wait a second. Don't lift." Briefly he was up on his columns of legs. "Where the dickens am I going?"

She tugged and hauled, and slued him round till he directly, unmistakably, confronted the wikiup. She got a shoulder under his left arm. The riotous hammering of her heart she sought to still by levity.

"Travel! Punch along—you!" She was so far under his arm, he couldn't possibly command her face. "I'll spread you up such a bed as you never even *saw* before!"

He tried to prevent her from starting him, he tried to speak. But he had no words—less than none. And he had no strength.

All considered, it was a quite sufficiently typical and balanced Western marriage. It lasted; and it brought as much—and perhaps as vivid—happiness as average human citizens may reasonably demand. If Jinny something overtopped her husband in spirit and intelligence, he for his part could at least fend for her according to the best usages of the simple land they inhabited.

And, indeed, so he did. Besides, children soon came, a handsome stepped row of boys and girls, each a fresh problem. Which meant that whatever superficial inequalities may originally have lain between the man and the woman, these younger and more importunate tyrants than Jinny promptly smoothed out.

His one familiar vice of gambling Drift gave up without turning a hair.

But it must be admitted against his plasticity of temper that he could not very long stomach the sheep. Try as he would, they worried and wearied and exasperated him. He seemed too bulky, too tall and heavily muscled, forever to be fussing and muddling in corrals over those blatting pygmies. Something about the work shamed him.

With Alec, the case was altogether different. He had been an office man who switched over to cattle late in life. He brought no hereditary prejudices or predilections to the stock business: one animal served his purpose about as well as another. When he had worn off his first natural edge of wool hatred, engendered here only during the past few months, he went along with the new Agate Valley Sheep Company swimmingly; prospered, in his degree, as richly as the flockmasters Cabell and Hood.

Drift, on the contrary, was the born horseman. He loved horses, understood their habits and instincts. Life unyoked to horses did not interest him: it even actively depressed him, staled his energy. So, after a while of sheep, he found financial aid for himself—which would hardly be difficult, with Cabell and Hood behind him—and took up the ranch on the Snowy Owl fork of the Brightwater, and launched into horse raising on his own.

That, for the rest, is George Decker Weir's story. A rather dully placid and uneventful career, many might think.

His parting words to Paul Bernhardt at the Green Bow wikiup, by the by, were not fulfilled. He never saw Paul again. Very few people in Breed County ever saw Paul after that June dawn. He vanished utterly.

Drift scarcely noticed. He happened to be mighty busy just about then.

Howard Fielding contributes the next complete novel, "The Peacemaker."

Ivory

By W. R. Hoefer

Author of "The Joke," "Old Kid Opportunity," Etc.

"Big-league class, like genius, radium, red-headed pacifists and other rarities, is frequently discovered in obscure places. Andy Turner, the Maroons' chief ivory hunter, knew this"

ALEXANDER POPE was a big-league writer long before the advent of baseball, as any littérateur who has had his nose sunburned at a ball park while noting the difference in the stuff of Walter and Samuel Johnson, can tell you.

Yet he perfectly epitomized the characteristic attitude of the average baseball fan, and, in the parlance of the bleacher occupants, said something when he wrote that hope springs eternal in the human breast.

Mr. Pope's remark anent hope was especially true of the Maroon fans. Each year hope took its leap in their myriad breasts with the coming of spring, and each year it died down with the going of summer and their pennant chances. But this year it sprang higher and lingered longer than formerly, for it was mid-May and still the Maroon team clung to a lofty position in the first division of the big-league club standings.

This unusual altitude of the local club at first surprised and mystified the fans and the baseball writers. Many of the more facetious rooters rudely declared that a guy had to lamp the sport sheets while standing on his bean in order to make the Maroons' position seem natural. But when the first of June discovered the local club still perched aloft in second place the city ceased joking and hope sprang higher than ever before. The town frenziedly clamored for the club management to bolster up the heroic but scant pitching staff and give the team a real chance at last.

The club owners thereupon took instant heed of the public clamor, for hope was springing as never before in their breasts also. A hurried meeting of the Maroon ways and means committee was called—consisting of "Buck" Connery, the manager, who was to discover the ways, and Judson Ballin, the principal owner, who was to provide the means—and the matter of securing additional baseball help was discussed in the club offices.

"We gotta have one more pitcher to stay in sight of the first division," stated Buck with his accustomed energy. "I got them guys all pepped and jazzed up so's they're ramblin' along like a flock of joy riders. Infield's goin' nice and smooth. Outfield's grabbin' everything in sight, and they're all crashing that old apple. But the pitchers're gonna crack wide open if they don't get some help pretty soon. We got a slew of doubleheaders comin' along our next trip."

"I'll buy a good pitcher," stated Ballin magnanimously. "We have to spend something besides time on the club this year. I'll go as high as thirty thousand dollars for a good one. We can get it all back in no time through the gate if we stay in the first division. The Grays and the Cubs could spare one. How about McCormack—he'd look nice in a crimson uniform."

"He sure would," admitted Connery. "But we oughta have a fork hander. We're shy on southpaw twirling now, and a couple of them clubs got nearly all left-hand swingers in their battin' order. We need more port-side pitching to stop 'em."

"Well, who do you want?"

"McGraw's got the baby I'd like," answered Connery. "This Larson; the big Swede's got everything includin' a grouch against the Giants, and I got an idea we might be able to get him. Then they's this Kinney the Bear Cats got."

"Go out and get one of 'em," directed Ballin tersely, and the brisk Connery went and tried. He faced the club owner later, however, with disappointment and disgust written large in his sun-bronzed, fighting face.

"They won't sell," said Connery shortly, to Ballin in the club offices one morning.

"Anybody'll sell," snapped Ballin shortly, "if you give 'em enough."

"Sure they will—but you ain't got enough," retorted the manager. "The Bears'll give up Kinney if we give up the city hall, a slice of Russia, and toss in the city income tax. I told Joe Healy, I says 'Joe, I don't wanna buy your whole dog-gone ball club,' and Joe says, 'Well, if you buy Kinney you're buyin' my whole dog-gone ball club,' and he's pretty near right at that, when you come to think of it. Them birds win only about the first and third Tuesday in the month, and when they cop it's genrully this Kinney that——"

"What about the Giants?" crossly interrupted the other.

"McGraw won't take money; he wants players."

"Well, he wants to trade Larson, don't he?"

"He don't," growled Connery. "From the way he talks. I offered Mac a good catcher and Mike Kino, our fourth best outfielder, and a utility player, for Larson."

"And what did he say?"

"Mac just laughed and says we oughta send that joke to the *Congressional Record* or one of them other comic papers. He claims he wouldn't trade the big Swede's mother-in-law for them three boys."

"Well, spring it," said Ballin pettishly. "What does he want?"

"I didn't wait to find out," said Connery shortly. "He started off with Jake Downey; Jake only hit .344 last year. And then he just mentioned our first baseman and two infielders, casuallike, and when he kind of alluded to the best catcher we got, I says, 'You ain't talkin' to me, Mac,' and I beat it. If I'd of stayed he'd of prob'ly wanted us to chuck in our outfield and bat boy and toss in the club secretary and the fans for good measure. He claims thirty thousand dollars wouldn't buy Larson's mean disposition and his toe plate, let alone the guy himself, the way players cost nowadays. Them birds're all anxious to trade with you; they'll trade a busted crutch for one of them Rolls-Royce autos any time."

Ballin stormed. "In the name of sweet heaven," he roared, "can't we do something? Somewhere between here and Shantung there must be a high-class left hander we can buy without giving up our entire ball club for him."

"If there is," replied Connery, "you won't locate him 'till you get as far as this here Shantung they talk about. And if you find one that far away he'll be a chink who'd rather slide a flatiron at a shirt in a laundry than sling a baseball at a batter on a ball field."

"There must be something we can do," wailed Ballin in despairing anger.

"We can pray," replied Connery. "And I'll send a wire to Andy Turner to watch out for a left hander. He's out West now scouting."

II.

Big-league class, like genius, radium, red-headed pacifists, and other rarities is frequently discovered in obscure places. Andy Turner, the Maroons' chief ivory hunter, knew this.

"Dig deep enough into the bushes and you'll find a star," Andy was wont to say. "Of course," he would add, "you gotta know a ball player from a classic dancer when you hunt for 'em that way. It's just like digging for diamonds; you gotta know 'em when you spot 'em, because they ain't polished when you turn 'em up."

Andy's shrewd, secretive face wrinkled into a leathery grin when he read Buck Connery's telegram and the subsequent frenzied letter regarding the urgent necessity for a good left hander. For Andy, sitting in the lobby of a little, small-town hotel out in Colorado, was at the very moment on the trail of a pitcher and a southpaw at that whom he had a hunch would prove a find. In fact, he had two pitchers in mind, although he hardly expected to find a phenom in the prospect he would look over that afternoon, a youth in the local State league whom he had been advised to see by a friend at Colorado Springs. He would have to go to the Pacific coast for the prospect he was really excited about. A newspaper friend in Frisco had tipped Andy off to this latter player, who was with the Sacramento club.

"Three years in a dinky little State league without going farther up ain't such an awful boost for a player," thought Turner, "but I just can't keep from having one little peek at this bird, anyway. Ira Drake knows ball players, and he must of seen something besides a left hand on him to tip me off. And, anyway, you never know what kinda birds they might have stuck away out here in the timbers."

Accordingly that afternoon he took the

single-track trolley out to the local State league park, sat inconspicuously up in the small, frame grand stand, and quietly watched the proceedings.

"He's a nice-built kid," mused the veteran scout when his prospect, a youth named Drucker, warmed up for the home club in front of the grand stand.

"Nice, easy motion, too," he thought as young Drucker wound up and hooked a fast curve over the plate for a strike. And when the first two visiting batters were retired on strikes the scout sat up a little straighter and began to take careful notice.

"Man, man, what smoke," grunted old Andy in the third inning as Drucker's fast ball whacked into the catcher's big mitt and the side was again retired without a hit, and then he watched even more intently. He noted every action of the youthful pitcher. He liked the latter's languid, easy, graceful motion in delivering the ball. He liked his quiet, confident manner out there on the slab, and he was surprised at the way the twirler fielded his position.

"That kid looks like he's got everything, at that," grunted the old scout, half aloud, in admiration, in the fifth inning. "Everything," he added grimly a little later, "but control." For Drucker had passed three batters in succession in the sixth inning after working the count up to two and three.

"Well, I know all I want to about *that* baby," quoth Andy to himself as he left the park. "A bird that's got everything except control ain't got a thing," and he forthwith dismissed young Drucker from his calculations and made for his hotel to pack up and leave for the coast. And, in so doing, the veteran scout made a bone play himself, albeit an excusable one, in the circumstances, for control was Drucker's strong point. The latter had been carefully working the corners of the plate. The three bases on balls should have been three beautiful strike-outs and would have been with expert umpiring. But, of course, Andy Turner didn't know that the arbiter behind the plate was working in his first—and last—game in the league, and was totally incompetent as his discharge the following day attested.

Once out on the coast Turner gumshoed into the Sacramento park and looked his other prospect, young Bergan, over very carefully. He stayed to watch him pitch three games, and what he saw satisfied him completely. Bergan was a six-foot, sinewy chap. He had speed, confidence, control, and occasionally worked a cunning change of pace. He looked like big-league class all over. Turner hurried to the Sacramento manager, once he had satisfied himself as to his "find," and offered to buy Bergan. But he found the management disinclined to sell until after the season, as his friend had warned him. That evening the scout sent a long telegram to the Maroon management, telling about Bergan and the club's attitude regarding his release.

"Buy him," ordered the management in a return wire, "if you really think he's big-league stuff. Go as high as twenty thousand if necessary." When, after much dickering, Turner arranged to purchase the pitcher's release for the Maroons the sale price was seventeen thousand five hundred.

"And he's worth every jitney of it," said the Sacramento manager to Andy Turner. "It's a stylish price for a minor leaguer, but if this kid pulls a Marty O'Toole on you and does a flivver you can come back here and bean me with a bat."

"I'll do it," promised Turner darkly, as he left, but he felt pretty certain there would be no occasion to keep his promise.

III.

The news of the Maroons' purchase was received in the sport world with mingled emotions. The Sacramento fans were indignant; for they bid both Bergan and their chance for the Coast League pennant goodby in the same breath. The Maroon fans were jubilant—it meant a chance for first division for them. Several sport writers waxed sarcastic in their comments—the Maroon management wasn't addicted to the spending of much money for baseball talent as a general rule and back in the Colorado State League there was one young man who received the news with expressions of rage and gloom that were alternately pathetic and awful to hear.

Young Dave Drucker read the brief news item in the local evening paper as he was riding home from the ball park in the trolley car after a game in company with his girlish-looking wife and scrappy, wise old Mike Tierney, the local club manager, a former famous big-league player of fifteen years ago.

His three-years' stay in a small, obscure league was easily accounted for. He had broken his ankle the middle of the first sea-

son and was out of the game the remainder of the year. In July of the preceding season he had been taken ill and was out of the game for a month and had resumed his playing in a weakened condition. Also he was working for the weakest team in the league, a hopeless tail-end outfit that usually required almost shut-out pitching to come anywhere near winning.

But this year young Drucker knew he was in superb shape and he desperately hoped for and faintly expected to attract the attention of some big-league scout. And when Andy Turner had arrived in town the bush leaguer's hopes had risen high. Andy had quietly gumshoed into the city in his usual secret way and thought that his presence as a scout was unobserved, but Vincent Croy, at the local telegraph office, had learned Andy was hunting ivory for the Maroons and had informed young Drucker of the fact.

"He passed me up," said Dave with quiet bitterness, letting the paper slip through his inert hands to the floor of the car. "He passed me up."

"Who passed you up?" inquired Tierney gruffly.

"Andy Turner," rasped the young giant fiercely, his anger blazing forth. "He signed this Bergan from the coast. They talk about hunting ivory from the bushes," he continued fiercely. "Why, that old rooster's got more solid ivory in his thick old knob than there is in all of Africa. The old blind owl wanted a left hander, huh? Why, he was lamping a big-league southpaw when I was bustin' 'em over the other day. And I had everything, that day, except an ump who could see a strike unless I laid it right over in the groove for them bums to lean against. Ivory! Huh; that's this Turner's middle name."

His wife looked up at him with wide, wistful eyes. "Don't get excited, Dave," said she, laying a sympathetic hand upon his arm. "You'll get your chance yet."

"I'll never get a chance, Della," said he with subdued bitterness, "unless I can get some of the breaks these other birds get. I been in the game three seasons now, and I ain't had a single break in my favor."

"Don't pull that breaks stuff alibi," grunted the veteran Mike, quiet humor in his cynical, shrewd old eyes. "They ain't nothing in it."

"Alibi!" Young Drucker flung the word at the other with savage scorn. "It ain't an alibi. It's a fact. I never get a break. For two seasons I get hurt or sick. This year, when I'm going right, I get enough luck to have an ivory hunter take a slant at me. What happens? They gotta stick a new cross-eyed ump in to work the plate who don't know the difference between Ban and Walter Johnson. He works in just one game the whole dog-gone season, when he's canned, and who hasta draw him in that game? Me. And this fathead of a Andy, the ugly old bonehead, has got all year to slip me the once over, and when does he do it? He's gotta pick out the one game when they got a feeble-minded porch climber umping it. If that's gettin' any breaks then I'm the Queen of England. And, besides, if this old geezer Turner knew any more about pitching than you do about Greek poetry he'd of known the umping was rotten. And on top of that I gotta get stuck with a ball club that almost drops dead when they cop unless I'm the guy that does it for 'em. Every time I get out on the hill I gotta figure on trimmin' eight of my own players besides the other guys. Don't talk alibi to me. I never beefed before in my life, but I'm makin' up for lost time right now."

Tierney laid a firm hand upon the other's knee. "Listen, Davey," said he kindly, "I'm only tellin' you this for your own good. Don't squeal about the breaks in baseball. Breaks can decide things in baseball—I admit that. But for every game they lose for a guy they's genrully some other breaks come along and win for him. I been trailing along in this old game now for twenty years. I played on the sand lots, I played in the bushes, and I played in the big leagues. I've had a few breaks in my day, too—both kinds. But they genrully even up. I lost out on a bundle of World Series kale one year when they traded me off a club the first month of the season that finely come through and copped a flag. An' two years later I got traded to a tail-end club that didn't look to have any more chance of copping than I got of gettin' into a Ziegfield chorus. An' *they* went an' copped. There's breaks an' breaks. But remember this, kid: in the long run the guys that get most of the breaks go out an' *make 'em.*"

Young Drucker glared at the other in answer. "Don't try and salve me that way," said he sourly. "The only breaks I can go and make myself'll be to go out and break some guy's dog-gone neck in about a minute if I get much sorer."

That evening, seated opposite his wife in their three-room flat at supper, young Drucker continued his savage tirade. His wife glanced at him occasionally with appealing, sympathizing eyes, and then, sitting on the arm of his chair, took one of his hands in hers.

"Dave," said she finally in a soothing little tone, "don't you think that maybe Mr. Tierney was right?"

"About what?" grunted Dave moodily.

"About luck—what you call the breaks. I mean what he said about making your own luck. Don't you think there might be something in that? He says successful folks make their own luck pretty much. Isn't there something you could do to make yours. Something that would just *make* them notice you in the bigger leagues?"

"Oh, sure," he replied with heavy sarcasm. "There's lots of little things I could do outside of striking out every guy I face in every game all season. I could locate that old simp of a Andy and choke him. That'd make the Maroons sit up and take notice. But they'd want me in the electric chair instead of on their boob, second-division club. Or I could go an' bean this ump who queered me, with my fast one. That'd make some big-league sheriff talk to the coroner about me."

But though he openly derided Mike Tierney's theory and his wife's suggesting it the thing gradually sank into his brain the more he thought of it.

"Old Mike might be right, at that," thought Drucker as he pondered the subject. "If them boobs won't come after me there oughta be some way I can go after them. Della's right, if I only could dope up the way."

Meanwhile, the Maroon fans who were anxiously praying that their ball team would not start their annual early descent but who were, none the less, half expecting the club to skid, anxiously awaited the coming of young Bergan, the coast phenom. He was, they felt, the additional help needed to keep the Maroons up in the first division. And when, after some long days of waiting, the club management announced, through the press, that the young phenomenon was on his way from the coast and would arrive in time to pitch a game by the end of the week, local fandom was astir with curiosity and expectation.

On Thursday morning, that week, Buck Connery was called to the door of the Maroon clubhouse by Ben Schramm, the ground keeper, just as the players were dressing for morning practice.

"This Bergan's here," announced Ben briefly, indicating a tall, determined-looking youth near by.

Connery inspected the pitcher critically, noted the well-set-up frame, the determined-looking face, and the keen, level, gray eyes of the player.

"I hope you ain't one of them morning-glories that bloom fine out in the bush an' fold up like a concertina the minute you hit a big town," he grunted as he shook hands.

"Guess not," said the other briefly.

"You cost us a lotta jack—for a busher," said Connery.

"I'm li'ble to cop you a lotta games—for a second-division outfit," was the reply.

"Well, maybe so. Andy tells me you oughta bring something besides a fancy price from the coast. He claims you got everything."

"He oughta know. He stayed to see me work in three games before he bought me. You must of seen my record on the coast, too. I copped twelve starts and lost only one so far this year with Sacramento."

"Well," drawled Connery. "Come on in an' get dressed. I'll see if you got anything to brag about besides the California weather when you warm up."

The impression created by the newcomer after he had warmed up with "Birdie" Camm, the regular backstop, was a decidedly favorable one.

"This kid's got all kinds of stuff, Buck," said Camm to the manager. "He's got a crazy-looking curve that busts in with an awful sharp break at a funny angle, and he's sure got a lot of smoke, too."

"He oughta have," said Connery. "Seventeen thousand dollars' worth of smoke *is* a lot. I hope he knows more about control than just how to spell it."

"He warms up like he's got it," said Camm. "He looks like he's got darn near everything."

"And he'll have my sympathy, also, if he don't suit them crabby fans in this town," replied Connery grimly as he left.

The young twirler seemed decidedly to suit the local fans from his first appearance before them, however. A generous crowd came out to inspect him that afternoon as he warmed up before the game, although they

knew he wouldn't pitch a game for several days. They liked his appearance, his manner, and his style in action, and, most of all, they raved about his speed.

"Oh, man, just watch that old pill zip in," howled a grand-stand fan as the new Maroon pitcher cut loose with his fast ball, and from that moment he was dubbed "Zip" Bergan by the rooters.

He first appeared in a game on the following Monday. Stan Slidell, an in-and-outer, started the contest for the locals against Pittsburgh and got by without any danger until the sixth inning. The Maroons were in a hitting mood, and in the third inning bunched a pass, two singles, and a triple for three runs. In the fifth they secured another run by a single, a steal, and a double. Slidell meanwhile had been going along in fine style and had shut out the opposing club. But in the sixth inning the Maroon hurler temporarily lost his control, passed the first two batters, and then, in trying to get the ball over for a strike, laid it over in the next man's groove. The batter set himself, swung from the end of his heavy bat, there was the sharp crack of the bat against the ball, and the next moment a fan in the right-field stand made a circus catch of the pellet as the three runners, seeing it was an easy home run, sauntered around the bases.

"The big bum," muttered Connery in disgust; "can't hold a four-run lead long enough for me to page another guy from the bull pen. The big bum," and he waved Slidell out of the box.

"Stick in Zip Bergan," howled a fan back of third base. Immediately various fans about the stands with whom the new pitcher had made a hit, by his speed and action when warming up before games, called for him.

"Zip, Zip—we want Zip," they roared, and gradually other fans joined in until the majority of the crowd got to its feet and joined in the chorus.

"Zip — Zip — we — want — Z-i-i-p," sounded forth in a barking roar from all over the field. Buck Connery, however, was taking no chances just then on a newcomer who had never in his life faced a big-league hitter in a game. The Maroons were still a run to the good, and he wanted that game. He signaled to the bull pen out near the exit gate where the relief pitchers were tossing the ball back and forth and Ig Scovill, a first-string pitcher, came sauntering in.

The opposing batter was the Pirate's lead-off man, a timely though not a frequent or long hitter, but a good waiter.

Scovill offered him a curve that broke in waist-high. He felt he had just caught the outside corner of the plate with it. The umpire called it a ball. Scovill violently protested. The umpire calmly ignored him.

"We want Zip!" bellowed the fan over back of third base. The rest of the crowd took up the chant.

"Zip—Zip—we—want—Zip!" came in a thundering roar. The umpire's decision coupled with the chanting from the stands seemed to unsettle the pitcher and his next offering was high and wide and only saved from being a passed ball by a jumping catch of Birdie Camm.

Then Scovill put over a strike, and the bleacher and grand-stand chanting ceased. The next was a ball. And immediately the cry boomed out again.

"Zip—Zip—we—want—Zip!" chanted the fans. Came another called strike—and blissful silence from the fans. Scovill stared angrily at the crowd for a moment and violently cut loose with a fast one.

"Ball four!" barked the umpire as the catcher reached way outside for the offering while the batter trotted to first base. Camm and the first baseman walked out to the pitcher and tried to settle him down. He went back to the box, pitched very deliberately, and put over a called strike. There was silence over the stands. It seemed to nettle Scoville again. His next pitch was low.

"We—want—Zip; Zip—Zip—we—want—Zip!" came the chant from the stands again. Another strike buzzed over the plate. Again silence fell over the crowd and a moment later the second batter walked to first base.

With this the entire infield came into the box and tried to steady the now angry pitcher down.

"Oh, I'll get this next guy," stated Scovill stubbornly, "if them crazy bugs in the stands'll leave me work long enough to try it."

And, with the batter under orders to look them over, Scovill slipped two strikes in succession across the plate. The batter bunted the next pitch, laid it down beautifully along the third-base line, and beat the throw to first by a hair.

Connery signaled from the bench and the furious Scovill slowly sauntered from the

box, past the right-field stands, past the outfield bleachers and on out to the showers, glaring as the insistent chorus of "Zip—Zip—we—want—Zip!" came in a thundering roar from the crowd.

"Put in Diblee," suggested some one to Connery.

"Put in 'Pie' Sudermann," said another.

"I'm gonna put in what them crazy bugs want," snarled Connery, in a rage at the situation. "It's lucky for me they ain't askin' for Sarah Bernhardt. They're howling for Zip Bergan an' they're gonna get him. An' believe me, they're gonna get all the Zip they want, too. Bags all crowded, a three-twenty clean-up hitter swinging his club out there—an' the damphools're howling for a guy fresh from the minors to try an' stop 'em."

"Zip—Zip; we want Z-i-i-i-p!" roared the crowd again.

"You'll get all the Zip you want if this kid Bergan lays the ball anywares near 'Good-night' Logan's bat," muttered Connery to the crowd as he waved the much-called-for pitcher in from the bull pen.

The big, six-foot recruit sauntered into the pitcher's box, fussed with his cap, nervously wiped the perspiration from his grim, stern-set face with his shirt sleeve, and pitched four preliminary balls to Birdie Camm. As Logan, the slugging clean-up hitter then stepped to the plate and slowly waved his big bat back and forth, the base runners pranced round their bases, the crowd settled itself back in still expectancy, the big pitcher glanced carelessly at the prancing runner at third base, then leisurely wound up and threw.

"Zip!" roared the delighted crowd as the sharp "whack" of the fast ball sounded in the catcher's mitt.

"Strike one," sang the umpire. The batter hadn't moved.

"Zip!" roared the fans again, in time with the second "whack" in the big mitt as Logan, the batter, swung himself completely around in a vain effort to connect with the pitcher's tremendous speed.

"Strike tuh!" barked the umpire.

There was a sharp crack of the bat against the ball at the third pitch and the coacher at third base ducked just in time to escape the whizzing ball that banged against the concrete wall, foul by four feet. Then Logan swung again fiercely at the next offering and Birdie Camm easily gathered in the high foul that descended a few feet back of the plate.

Connery, on the bench, drew a deep, audible breath of relief.

"That kid's either dog-gone lucky or dog-gone good," said he.

The second batter popped an easy little fly to the first baseman and the third went out on a high fly to center field.

"He must be dog-gone good," said Connery as the Maroons came in from the field.

There was no further scoring in the game. The big pitcher, using his tremendous speed and occasionally alternating with a sharp-breaking curve, kept the Pirates from scoring during the remainder of the game and allowed two scant hits.

He started, finished, and won a game five days later, allowing no earned runs and six widely scattered hits, and thereafter took his regular turn in the box, losing only an occasional game and occasioning much favorable comment around the league as the pitching "find" of the year. The Maroons seemed assured of a first-position berth, and the fans were warm and vociferous in their praise of the young phenomenon.

"Zip—Zip—we—want—Zip!" continued to be their battle cry whenever the big youngster started. Yet, despite his unusual start and the acclaim he was receiving from the press and the fans, he seemed worried. The fact was noticed by several members of the club including Buck Connery.

"I think he's maybe afraid that he can't stand the big-league pace," said Buck to Birdie Camm, one evening in their hotel in Philadelphia. "You notice he keeps using his speed right along an' breezing them birds even when he's workin' on a big lead. The other day, after he shut out the Braves, even after we got ten runs for him early in the game an' batted out three of Stallings' pitchers, I says to him, 'Bergan, when you got a nice lead to work on why don't you ease up a little an' save that wing of yours? You don't hafta whiff every guy who comes up. We got a infield and a outfield, ya know.' But he just looked kinda stubborn an' says, 'No ease-up stuff for me. I had one helluva time gettin' up here under the Big Top an', bulieve me, I'm gonna stick; that's me.' So I says, 'Kid, you don't needa be scared of gettin' the can whatever happens. I couldn't fire you if I wanted to. If I should ask for waivers on you they'd be fifteen big-league managers would run their feet thin tryin' to

get to a telegraph office first to claim ya.' But he claims he ain't takin' no chances."

"Zip aims to stick up here all right, but that ain't what he seems so worried about," averred Birdie Camm. "I think it's got something to do outside his pitching."

"Maybe he stuck some guy in the hospital with his fast one in California," suggested Jake Downey.

"The guy'd be in a coffin instead of a hospital if Zip ever dusted him off with his fast one," said Pete Coughlin, the shortstop.

"Maybe he's in love," said Camm.

"Naw," retorted Downey. "He's married. I hear his wife's in California."

"Maybe he can't dope out his income tax. That drove more'n one poor guy nuts," offered Coughlin.

"He might not like the climate," said Camm. "You know what them California birds are about climate. If some of them guys out there ever get drafted into heaven they'd kick to Saint Peter and claim they'd rather stick in the Coast League."

"Aw, he's just naturally a left hander, that's all," said another player positively as the meeting broke up.

But whatever it was the impression that there was something unusual about his new pitcher was gradually forcing itself upon Buck Connery through several little incidents that occurred. For one thing, Andy Turner, now down in Texas, sent a puzzling reply to a letter Buck had written the scout. And after reading Andy's letter with an astonished look the manager stopped his sensational recruit as the latter was leaving the Polo Grounds after a game one day.

"Zip," said Connery in a semijocular tone, "since when have you been dyeing your hair. Or maybe you wear a wig now."

The other snorted. "The only wig I wear is the one they slipped me when I was first signed up in this world," he replied. "And it's the same color red now that it was in the original package."

"Well, it's darn funny," replied Connery with a puzzled brow. "I don't aim to get nosey about the way you fix yourself up. That's your own business. You could even wear corsets for all of me. But I wrote Andy Turner a while ago that the red-headed guy he turned up for me out in Sacramento, meanin' you, was singeing the eyebrows offen the batters up here with his smoke. And Andy writes me back that this Bergan, again meanin' you, must of drank a bottle of red hair dye an' it went to his head. Or else some dame on the train maybe busted her bottle of red hair stain over your bean so's your hair'd match the Maroons because, says Andy, when he signed you up on the coast *your hair was a light yellow.*"

The other merely flushed as deep a shade as his hair at this and walked off without a word.

And two days later Connery received another communication that puzzled him.

"The fans and the sport writers ain't the only ones that have gone crazy over Zip Bergan," said he to Birdie Camm at lunch. "Bergan's pitching has made poor old Andy Turner so bats he's gone color blind. And now here's a poor guy who's gone just natchully plumb loco—crazy—dippy—clean offen his knob."

"How come?" asked the stocky catcher.

"He sends me a wire from a little burg out in Colorado and he claims *he's Bergan himself.* He says he's just got round to read the papers about Zip. He claims he's been in a hospital for some time."

"He means a insane asylum."

"And," continued the harassed Connery. "He's gonna be on here to see me day after to-morrow. They's something looney in Denmark an' on my ball club. Andy don't even remember the color of the guy's hair he signed up, and another gink is so far gone out in Colorado he don't even remember himself. I always knew a swell pitcher like Zip could make some of the batters kinda crazy, but darned if I thought he was so good his pitching could pry folks in other parts of the country away from their senses."

Two days later, after Zip had pitched and won a close extra-inning game from the Giants, things began to happen. Part of the huge crowd of fans, anxious for a close inspection of the now famous young twirler, had followed the club off the field and was thickly and excitedly pressing in on the visitors' clubhouse. A few of the more daring, insistent ones even attempted to gain admittance after the players were within. Joe Temple, a Polo Grounds policeman, was having his troubles in keeping them away, and it was some time before the park attendants could get the mob outside the exit gates and out into Eighth Avenue. Just as Joe thought he had the last of the milling crowd of curious fans outside, he was charged by three men, two of them insistent, and the other, a husky youth, who seemed violently angry

about something, and at their rear was a slim, girlish-looking young woman with wide, anxious eyes.

The men charged the clubhouse door, which Temple was desperately guarding, and insisted upon admittance.

"Lemme in," the younger of the three roared. "Leave me at this crook. The big yegg never sent that wire to Connery like he promised. Let me inside. I'm gonna kill the big crook."

"We demand entrance," said one of the others with authority, displaying a badge.

"Open that door!" roared the third. "It's all right. Buck'll see me. Tell him it's Mike Tierney from Colorado."

"I want to see my husband," pleaded the young lady wistfully.

"What's all that confounded racket," demanded Connery, coming to the door. "Can't you chase them crazy fans away, Joe?"

Temple opened the door a trifle. "They claim they ain't fans, Buck," said he.

"What do they want?"

"They want Zip Bergan. One's a detective. He says he wants to verify Zip. Another's a wild man. He claims he wants to kill him. Another says he's a bush-league manager. He wants Zip back on the club or a big wad of dough instead," explained Temple hurriedly as he continued guarding the door. "And the other's a lady. She claims she's Zip's wife. And she just wants him."

Connery returned inside. "Come here, Zip!" he called to the pitcher, who had stepped from under the shower bath and was briskly drying himself. "Get some clothes on an' take a slant at this mob of nuts. See if you know 'em."

"I guess I know 'em," said Zip wearily. "In fact, I been expectin' most of 'em most any day now. But I don't care," he added desperately. "I made good up here. I got my chance and made good. It was a dirty trick to play—I should of sent that telegram for the guy; and I should of let Mike and Della know where I was—but I didn't dare take a chance until I had a good trial in the big league." He partly dressed himself and went to the door and thrust his head outside.

"That's him," said the detective with satisfaction.

"Sure it's him—the big crook!" roared the younger man.

"You son of a gun!" grinned the older man.

"Dave!" cried the lady joyfully.

"I'll be right out after I get dressed," said the pitcher, and withdrew.

A few minutes later, in company with Connery and three of the players, the big pitcher came outside.

The young, husky chap made a rush for him. "You big crook!" he howled. "You hundred-per-cent liar. Just leave me get one swing at ya. You promised to send that wire to Connery when you took me off the train to the hospital—and instead you went on and claimed you was Bergan." He made another rush, and it took three of the players to restrain him from attacking the object of his remarks.

"That's the guy that thinks he's Zip," said Connery. "Take him away from here."

The pitcher interrupted quietly. "Leave him right here, Buck," said he. "He belongs here. He's Bergan."

Connery stared in amazement. "Bergan," he said slowly. "Then who, for the love Isaac, are you?"

"I'm Dave Drucker," said the other quietly. "And these folks are right. This is Mike Tierney—you must remember Mike. He played the outfield on these same Polo Grounds over fifteen years ago. Della's my wife. And," indicating the irate, still struggling young giant, "he's Bergan. I don't know the other rummy."

"He's a detective, Dave," said Della. "When you suddenly left and we got no word from you Mr. Tierney and I hired a detective to find you. He saw your picture in the paper the other day and we came on here."

Buck Connery stared, his mouth agape. "Say," said he, "how did this all come to happen?"

"It didn't come to happen," explained Dave Drucker. "I made it happen. And you can blame Mike and Della for it just as much as me." The two looked mystified.

"Mike told me that the guys that mostly get the breaks go out and make em. And Della got me to believe it was so. I been in a dinky little bush-league outfit almost three years when I knew I could make good up here if I ever got a chance. I had some hard luck. Then, this year the Maroons' chief ivory hunter looks me over—and when

I heard about it I thought I was made at last. But I couldn't get no breaks, even then. I drew an ump who was so rotten he lasted in even a bush league just one day. But it was long enough to queer me. And so then I just took Mike and Della's dope and, when I got my chance, I went out and made my own breaks."

The real Bergan made another desperate effort to get at young Drucker. When the players again restrained him Dave went on:

"It was on a Monday and we didn't have a game that day. So Mike let me go home. I took the train and was on my way when I met Bergan. He was on his way to join the Maroons. We got to talkin' and we found out we was both ball players. He told me he was Bergan who was just sold to the Maroons. I didn't have anything in mind right then. We went into the diner together, and some time afterward he began to look kinda funny and said he felt awful sick. Pretty soon he felt so sick he said he'd hafta get off the train. I got off with him and took him to a doctor at the first stop. The doc looked him over and said he'd hafta be rushed to a hospital. He must of got this ptomaine poisoning from some canned stuff he ate. I felt darned sorry for him just then and told him not to worry. I'd wire the club he was taken sick and would be on a little later. I meant to do it, too. But when I left that hospital I got to thinkin' what Mike said about makin' your own breaks and what Della said about wasn't there something I could do to *make* them big-league birds notice me. So I figured here was my chance. The way to make 'em notice me was to bust right in on 'em and sign myself up without waiting for no ivory hunter to tip me off."

"Some crust!" muttered Connery.

"Oh, man," chuckled Tierney in delight.

"The dirty crook!" roared Bergan.

"I hadda take a lotta chances, of course," continued Drucker musingly. "I took a chance that Andy Turner wouldn't be with the club when I got there. And I won. I took the chance that Bergan was so sick he couldn't think or read or talk baseball until I got a trial. And I guess he was. And I hadda take a long chance that no fans or baseball writers up here had ever saw Bergan on the coast. And I won out there, too. I knew no one'd know me. I'd never been near enough to the Big Tent before to get known. And then after I slung a couple of good games and made good I didn't care how soon I was found out. I been expectin' to see Bergan long before this."

"See that!" cried the furious Bergan. "He admits it all. The big bush-league crook admits it. Gimme just one swing at him."

"I s'pose," said Drucker slowly, looking at the detective, "they could even stick a guy in the pen for using another bird's name."

"I'll stick you in a grave," snarled Bergan.

"Hey, just cut that sore-head stuff out," said Connery, looking thoughtfully first at Bergan and then at Drucker, a wide grin stealing over his tanned face as he did so. "Zip did pull this impersonation stuff on you, Steve. An' I s'pose it's enough to make any guy a little sore."

"*Little* sore!" roared Bergan. "Why, the guy's got my job now."

"No, he ain't," said Connery. "You don't s'pose when we been lookin' for a couple of guys like you for the Maroons for years that I'm gonna be looney enough to let you go now I got *two* of ya, do ya? Your job's as good here as it ever was. And if Dave here hadn't of gone out and made his own breaks he'd still be down in the sticks an' we'd be down in the cellar maybe. You ain't hurt a-tall. You're just the way you were before."

It took some time and argument to pacify the irate Bergan, but finally a slow grin stole over his countenance as he shook hands with Drucker.

"You sure got some crust, I'll say," said he. "You old left-handed chunk of ivory."

"What about me?" asked Mike Tierney. "I lose my pitching staff. Don't we get anything for Dave?"

"You sure do," chuckled Connery. "You get a nice fancy price for him."

"Dave," said his wife, throwing her arms about him and looking up at him with affectionate gladness, "you did make them notice you, didn't you?"

"You tell 'em, Della," grinned young Drucker as he shyly kissed her, "while I bust over my fast one."

"Well, Buck," grinned Tierney, "old Andy Turner might be a high-class scout, but that's one piece of ivory he missed."

Connery rubbed his jowl reflectively at the remark. Then he gazed long and earnestly at young Drucker.

"Yeah, old Andy missed young Drucker," agreed Connery solemnly. "But I can't blame him for that. 'Cause if Dave is ivory then Solomon was a simp."

The Adelaide Thousand

By Raymond J. Brown

Author of "Mister Hoyle," "The Public Decides," Etc.

Bicycle racing in Australia is the theme of this. An American champion finds that he is up against a new kind of game over there, and it takes all of his ingenuity to devise a way of beating it

DOING a high dive over the handlebars was "Lonny's" own idea. To me it listened awful frowsy, like the chirps from a basso lad who's trying to lend a harmonious tenor to a throw-together quartet; and I told him so, ornamenting my thoughts on the subject with such adjectives and participles as drop natural into a heart-to-heart conversation between two guys who do not feel the hampering effect of the rules of polite de-bate. But I might have saved about a thousand cubic inches of breath. Offering Lonny an argument on any proposition that he's had first say on does you as much good as hacking at a redwood tree with an ax that came in a five-dollar tool chest. Around the bike tracks they call me "Windy" Bush, and I'm accused of having a tongue equipped with ball bearings; but, in bandying repartee with Lonny, said tongue is about as useful for the dissemination of audible sounds as a busted phonograph record.

The Lonny I'm talking about, of course, is Lonny Adair. Referring to the sport pages of the newspapers we find him alternately mentioned as the Handicap King and the Biking Viking, usually with the words young and handsome appended for descriptive purposes. The first title Lonny won honestly enough by his knack of plunging off scratch like an insane comet, overhauling and passing such ambitious pedalers as might be taking up track space in the same heat, and rolling on to hollow and profitable victory. Lonny's other newspaper monicker was invented by a sports writer, who thought Viking fitted one of Lonny's whirlwind methods and slightly Scandinavian appearance; for Lonny, although he first saw the light, as the saying is, in the State o' Maine and was Irish as Donegal where he wasn't Yank, had a mop of yellow curly hair, blue eyes, a comely cast of countenance, and a six-foot-two, two-hundred-pound body that made the knowing observer think of Swedish navigators or Norwegian ski hoppers.

But, anyhow—Lonny had enjoyed a grand season in America. He had romped through the handicap and open events in Newark, Boston, Philly, and Providence in a way that the other cyclists considered ruthless and selfish. He had given Kramer an awful run for the sprint championship, and he had crowned his year's work by winning the New York six-day race, fighting off the combined efforts of eight other fairish teams single-handed and alone in the last wicked half hour of the grind after Paddy Dolan, his partner, had cracked his wrist in a spill. After the race, Lonny and I paused in New York long enough to nick two Proctor theaters for three hundred bones each with an act consisting of exhibitions on the home trainer by Lonny and announcements and humorous sayings by yours truly; then we hopped to Frisco and took a boat for Australia.

The invasion of the antipodes was a bright idea of mine. I interviewed the manufacturers of the Arrow bicycle, which Lonny was willing to put in writing was the best in the world—as long as the makers kept him on the pay roll—and they agreed to finance the trip. The theory was that, as soon as the Australians witnessed Lonny mowing down their star pedal pushers at all kinds of racing, they would blame it on the bicycle he rode.

Well, in due course we reached Melbourne. Christmas and spring arrive at about the same time in Australia, and we found the stage all set for us, meaning that the bike season was well under way and that public interest in the American Handicap King was at fever heat, as the fellow says. Lonny

trained long enough to exchange his sea legs for bike legs and then took the track for the beginning of the grand clean-up. A one-mile handicap was selected for the first blow to be delivered in the cause of American athletic supremacy and Arrow bicycle exports. There was a gasp of admiration, especially from the lady bike fans, as Lonny hurled off his bath robe and disclosed his long and graceful person. Then he mounted his nickel-plated Arrow and made a circuit of the arena to the accompaniment of the "Star-spangled Banner" from the band and screeches and handclapping from the spectators.

"Enjoy it while you can, Lonny," I whispered to him as I grabbed his saddle after his triumphal tour of the track. "They won't be whooping it up like that for you after you've won a few races."

"Their dough's good, ain't it?" inquired Lonny with a grin. "We didn't come here to get cheered."

Lonny was riding in the third preliminary heat of that handicap. Of course, he was on scratch, sharing that privilege with Alf Neale, the Australian champion, and Eddie Thacker, a New Zealander, who was esteemed a demon awheel in Melbourne and environs. Neale had copped the first heat laughing, and Thacker had pedaled in third, close enough to qualify for the finals, in the second installment. The third heat was no set-up for Lonny—on paper at any rate. There he was on scratch all by his little lonesome, the closest man in front of him forty yards away. From there on riders dotted the track to the one-hundred-and-thirty-yard mark, which is about all the handicap any bike rider is entitled to in a race of a mile provided he's under eighty years old and isn't competing against a locomotive.

However, at the gun I gave Lonny a shove, he lurched off his saddle and started churning on his pedals and he'd made up ten yards on the field before the Australian lads seemed to realize that in bike racing as in life a good start covers a multitude of deficiencies.

It was just grind, grind, grind for the whole three laps of the mile, and the finish disclosed Lonny out in front by the length of the stretch, laughing up at the stands and nodding to invite the plaudits of the multitude. But somehow or other the applause missed fire. At all events, instead of an ovation, all Lonny got for his ride was a ripple of handclapping and a few smiles from the lady spectators. The rest of the fans seemed too dumfounded or something to give Lonny a tumble. He got off his bike and ducked to the training quarters, shaking his head disappointedlike.

"I don't seem to be what you might call —popular," he sort of growled as I carried his bike in for him.

"I told you how it would be," I reminded him. "Make the finishes closer," I advised. "The win by inches gets 'em all the time—all over the world."

"Closer!" snorted Lonny. "There ain't a rider here that can make it close for me."

"I want you to make it close for *them*," I explained. "No patriotic guy likes to see a foreigner give the national bear cats a showing up."

There was ten pounds in the win for Lonny, and I must admit that he proved that the Arrow bike, properly ridden, is capable of some going; but the crowd greeted the performance with all the enthusiasm a scenic picture draws at a movie show. Also, there was an attitude of unfriendly suspicion on the part of the track officials which made no hit with me. The track bosses looked like they feared they were being jobbed and wondered how it was being done.

I mentioned my distaste of prevailing atmospheric conditions to Lonny, and drew from him a horse laugh.

"What do we care what they think of us?" he asked. "I can win every time I take the track and——"

"It don't do to be too blamed smart," I broke in. "You're only one against all the riders in Australia—and you've got the officials to contend with, too."

"Ps-sh—for all of them!" laughed Lonny, snapping his fingers. "I got the speed; they can't take that away from me."

"They can rough you, and the officials can disqualify you and——"

"Let 'em try it!" snapped Lonny, stretching out his long arms and filling his chest.

I had a notion that all the rough, rowdy, and unlawful tactics which on the bike track are camouflaged under the name of strategy were American inventions. I thought that the adroit use of the elbow and the hip in tight places, the handy aid to the hard-pressed known as the "switch," the consolidation of resources and split of the purse by two or more riders, and all those enter-

taining little practices were products of Yankee ingenuity with Lonny playing the leading Edison. I thought so, that is, until Lonny got well into his Australian campaign. Then I learned different, and so did he.

Lonny could rough it on foot or awheel with any man. Crowding Lonny was about as sensible a proceeding as disputing the right of way with the Congressional Limited. But in Australia—as the fellow says—oh, boy! What happened to Lonny made the surprise party that was tendered to one J. Willard on July 4, 1919, look like the Ladies' Aid Society's reception in honor of the new rector. They let him win a few races; then they climbed him.

Every time I pushed Lonny off for the start of a new race my face fell automatically into an expression which plainly said: "I wonder what they've got cooked up for him this time!"

Except for two or three more or less important considerations, we'd have welcomed an excuse to duck out and beat it for home. One of our reasons for staying on was your deponent's lack of eagerness to report failure to the Arrow Bicycle Company. The other was the Adelaide Thousand.

In Australia bike racing is not conducted as in this country where races are held only on Saturdays, Sundays, holidays, or at other times when it is possible to collect a crowd in a stadium. Australian cycling is carried on much on the same plan as our horse racing—with continuous meetings of a certain number of days on the various tracks and racing every afternoon. Also, as it used to be on most of our horse tracks, the vulture bird, known as the bookmaker, occupies a prominent place in the proceedings, for there is open—very open—betting on the various events. There are also rich stake races, with the entrants nominated months in advance, paying fees at intervals, and liable to handicap penalties for winning between the time of nomination and the race; quite like the stakes of the turf. The Adelaide Thousand was the Derby of Australian cycling. Think of it—a thousand pounds, five thousand American ducats, as the reward for winning one little dash of a mile! The race got its name from the city where it was held.

Shortly after Lonny had plunked down his first entry fee and nominated himself for the Adelaide Thousand a stout gent with a flowing blond mustache, a tweed suit, and a gawblime-me accent introduced himself to us as Jerry Taylor, admitted without shame that he was a sporting person just at present engaged in making a future book on the Adelaide Thousand, and announced that Lawrence Adair, the American Handicap King, had been installed by him as favorite for the event at the prohibitive odds of three to one. Moreover, added the bookie, he didn't propose taking in any money on Lonny even at that short price, but was going to bet on Lonny to win with every shilling that was played into his book on the other cyclists.

"Mark me, lad," he told Lonny, "they'll myke ye hodds hon afore the bloomin' ryce, an', if ye're wishin' to plyce a wyger or so on yeself, now's the time to myke yer bets. If ye got a quid or two ye'd like to be bettin', I'll get ye four or five to one for it—an' no commission."

We both fell. Lonny dug five hundred—I'm talking dollars now—of his six-day and other winnings out of the old trunk tray and I kicked in with two hundred more. The four or five to one which the bookie promised us looked like money from home just then, for, after what he'd shown since coming to Australia, it didn't appear that any native rider could make it even interesting for Lonny in the big race.

Then it was that the home-bred wheelmen and officials put into effect their clever little schemes.

A little over two weeks before the scheduled date of the Adelaide Thousand, Taylor came to us with tears in his eyes and in his voice. They were racing at Sydney at the time, in the big Cricket Grounds, and that afternoon Lonny had been shut out of two races.

"Lad," Taylor addressed Lonny, "ye've got to do somethin'. Unless ye win at Hadelyde I'm a ruined man. I'm an Orstrylian, but I'll tell ye the things them beggars are doin' to ye are scand'lous; an' I'd s'y so even if I 'adn't a shillin' bet on ye. Ye're the greatest lad I ever seen set on a wheel, an' damme it's a bloomin' disgryce to the nyme o' sport that low trickery an'——"

"Yeah, I know all about that," Lonny interrupted him dryly. "It's certainly up to us to protect the 'nyme o' sport'—'specially where it concerns our bank rolls. I'm with you there, old-timer, all the way!"

Taylor blinked at Lonny a few times, failing to get his sarcasm; then he let loose another wail.

"Cawn't ye do somethin'?" he almost wept. "Somethin' to hequalize the scoundrelly tricks they're pl'yin' ye? I cawn't 'ave ye lose—cawn't hafford it. I'll myke it up to ye no matter what it is ye——"

"Hey?" broke in Lonny. "What's that?"

Somewhere in Taylor's talk Lonny had caught the jingle of coin. I could see that from the eager glow that came to his eyes and the snappy way he picked the bookie up.

"I'm—I'm desperate!" groaned Taylor. "I'm stykin' me all on ye, an' I'll myke it up to ye if ye 'aul me through."

"Talk pounds and shillin's!"

Taylor thought for a second. Then he swung out an arm and grabbed Lonny by the shoulder.

"Lad," he said, "Jerry T'ylor's gryteful to them as treats 'im fair; an' Jerry's word is 'is bond. That's 'is motter—p'y what 'e owes; do fair by them as does fair by 'im. Lad, if ye win the Hadelyde Thousand, ye're Jerry's partner—'arf an' 'arf."

"You mean," stammered Lonny kind of breathlessly, "you mean it's fifty-fifty—an even cut between you and me on all you win?"

Taylor nodded.

"How much is my end?"

Taylor took a quick look at a little red-covered book.

"By the d'y of the ryce," he said after some mental figuring, "my wygers will haggregate some ten thousand pounds."

"Hey!" yelped Lonny. "Ten thousand—fifty thousand bucks? You mean I collect twenty-five thousand *dollars* if I cop this race?"

"Yes," said Taylor. "That's——"

"It's won!" screeched Lonny so suddenly that Taylor jumped a foot. "Squire," and he laughed, walloping the bookie on the back, "your fortune's made! And all I got to do to gather in twenty-five thousand bucks is to win a bike race! Cripe! I'd—I'd murder every bike rider in Australia for half of that! This sure is the land where money grows on trees!"

Taylor caught some of Lonny's enthusiasm and started to grin. You could see that he was already counting his winnings.

"If you'll pardon me, gents," I remarked, breaking in on the love feast, "I'd like to remind you that you're overlooking a few things."

"Hah?" gasped Lonny, coming out of his dream, and "Eh?" wheezed Taylor.

"You're overlooking," I continued, "some twenty-five or thirty Australian bike riders. What are they going to be doing while——"

"Trust old Kill Joy to make a bum crack!" growled Lonny disgustedly. "But, as long as you've brought up the subject, Windy," he said, shaking his finger in my face, "I'll tell you what those thirty birds'll be doin'—they'll be trailin' *me*—and so far back that they won't know whether I'm on a bike or a wheelbarrow!"

"Like this afternoon?" I suggested. "And like yesterday afternoon? And the day before that? When was it you win your last race, anyhow? About three weeks ago, wasn't it?"

The slightly seasick look that Taylor had worn when he first came into our hotel room returned to his face. Lonny, too, lost a lot of the pep and confidence with which he had been raising Taylor's spirits. But Lonny is a game guy, and he was on top of me in a second.

"I said I was goin' to win that race," he declared, dignifiedlike. "And I'm goin' to do it if—if I have to break every bone in my body!"

He stopped short as he said this. A thoughtful kind of look came to his face. He stood there for maybe ten seconds, gazing off into space while Taylor and I watched him, puzzled. Then his face lighted up. He brought his right fist down into his left palm with a crack like a starter's gun.

"By cricky!" he barked, his eyes all glowing and his voice shaking just a little with excitement. "That's it! I've got it!"

"Got—what?" I asked him.

"A broken bone!" cried Lonny. "That's the caper! By gum, that'll do it!"

"If what you're saying makes sense——"

"Windy, old stick in the mud," cried Lonny, throwing both his arms around me and lifting me clear off the floor, "we're millionaires! That Adelaide purse, and all the trimmin's that go with it—they're ours! It's just like we had the dough in the bank—now!"

"Wait a minute," I requested. "Let me get you right on——"

"Look!" cried Lonny.

He leaped across the room, grabbed up a chair, planted it on the floor between Taylor and me, and straddled it, facing the back. He took a grip on the back and then began moving his long legs, just like he was pedaling his bike.

"Look!" he cried again, grinning from ear to ear. "I'm on the track. I've just rode a mile handicap. I'm rollin' around, waitin' for you, Windy, to grab my bike and help me off. I start wabblin'—like this," he illustrated, putting his feet on the floor and jerking the chair from side to side. "My handlebars are loose—I'll see to that—I can't control my wheel. Suddenly—bing! —like this!" And Lonny took a firm hold on his seat, gathered his legs under him and shot over the back of the chair, landing on his hands on the floor, turning completely over and crashing down on his back in a way that shook the hotel building. Then he began rolling around the floor and groaning as if in pain. I hopped forward and stooped over to help him, for it certainly did appear that he was hurt. He saw me coming and jumped to his feet, laughing in glee.

"Windy, my son," he chuckled, "you spoiled my act, just when it was gettin' good, but you certainly proved my point!"

"Proved your—what in blazes is eating you?" I bellowed. "Have you gone crazy? Are you——"

"If it fooled you," and Lonny grinned, "what's it goin' to do to them other birds? The stunt I just pulled was a rehearsal of a fake fall I'm goin' to stage at the track to-morrow." He crooked his right arm in front of his body and screwed up his face like he was suffering agonizing pain. "Oh!" he cried. "My collar bone! It's broken! Now have you got the idea?" he asked me.

I had. If he faked a fall from his bike and a busted shoulder, apparently he'd be out of the running for the Adelaide Thousand. The result would be that the odds against him in the future books would go skyrocketing, and, when he did appear—just in the nick of time, like a movie hero—to take his place for the race, the handicapper would be kind to him, even the Australian riders might feel inclined to let a cripple down easy, and, before anybody was aware that the supposed invalid was in reality at the top of his form, Lonny would be well on his way to a soft win.

Lonny listened to all I had to say. "Windy," he remarked when I'd run out of words and breath, "you can't stop me from doin' it, no more than you can stop the sun from risin'."

"I know you can do it," I admitted. "It isn't that that worries me—it's the risk of getting caught. Why, they'd rule you out of the game for life—and their ruling would stand over home, too."

"Bunk!" snorted Lonny. "Taylor, old crook," he told the bookmaker, "you just go ahead and make your bets. I'm goin' to make good on this job. And to show I'm on the level," he added, "I've got another thousand of my own that I want you to bet for me when the price gets good and ripe."

Well, there was no use talking to him. The next afternoon, Lonny finished a mile handicap far back in the ruck. He rolled around the track, back-pedaling to check his speed, when all of a sudden his front wheel began to shake like a shimmy dancer. Then Lonny dived. Some acrobat, that boy, and some actor! He did his plunge right in the middle of a group of five or six riders, upsetting two of them and sending the rest scampering up the track like scared deer.

A slick-looking fellow with a bossy air was out of the grand stand and down the track almost as soon as Lonny fell. He announced himself as a doctor and took charge of the case before any other medical persons could butt in. Wherever Lonny and Taylor dug up this doctor, he was a cuckoo —and he and Lonny went through their little playlet as though they'd been rehearsing it for weeks. Lonny, having suffered a cracked shoulder two years before, knew just when to squeal and when to make faces indicating relief as the doctor worked over him, and the doctor worked so hard he actually perspired. Temporary bandages were on Lonny, and he was in the doctor's automobile and away from the track before the crowd in the stands got through their first buzz of excitement.

I didn't see Lonny again until that night when he came to the hotel with his right arm in a sling. And he showed me that his doctor had put on the bandages so that he could move his wrist and turn his forearm, keeping the blood circulating and the muscles from stiffening in that way.

"I've got to go through with this *right*," explained Lonny. "I can't let myself get caught without bandages—even while I sleep. I got to protect myself—and Taylor and the doc."

"You're making an awful mistake, Lonny," I said. "Crooked work is all right in its place, but——"

"This is the place for it," he insisted. "You've known me a long time, Windy, and

you've never known me to pull anything phony unless somebody else started to trim me first. If puttin' somethin' over on these Australian bikers ain't just protectin' myself, fightin' fire with fire, then I don't know."

The newspapers, of course, told of the "accident" to Lonny, and shed tears over it—tears of joy, I mean. They commended Lonny for his gameness in insisting that he would ride in the Adelaide Thousand, broken shoulder and all, but at the same time they took care to point out that such a thing was impossible, quoting eminent medical authorities to prove that a broken collar bone could not knit in less than three weeks and that, even if Lonny was lucky enough to lose his sling and bandages in two weeks, he could not win the big race because the strain of pulling on his handlebars in so gruelling a contest as the Adelaide Thousand was likely to be, would certainly cause the bone to break again.

And then newspapers, bike fans, riders, and officials sat up straight and blinked and stared two days later when Lonny appeared on the Sydney track and got out his bicycle to train! I was knocked over with the rest of them, although I didn't see it, but only heard about it. Lonny had turned up the ram's-horn bars of his bike, so that he could sit upright in the saddle and steer with his free left hand. The sight of a man with his arm in a sling on a racing bicycle brought Lonny the heartiest, sincerest round of applause he'd received since his first appearance in Australia.

However, Lonny went out and trained lightly every day—just enough to keep him on edge. I spent my time, as Lonny suggested, interviewing sporting-goods dealers on the Arrow bicycle question, and I did pretty good. Meanwhile Jerry Taylor was betting all the money he could get his hands on at fancy prices.

Lonny's "accident," his lay-off, and the poor form he had been showing in public failed to touch the handicapper's heart much, for, when the handicaps for the big race were announced, Lonny was found to be nestling on a mark twenty yards behind scratch. Neale and Tracker were on scratch, and the other fifty or more candidates for the big dough were down for handicaps of from ten to a hundred and twenty-five yards.

The Thousand drew out a crowd which matched those you'd see in America at a World Series, a Yale-Harvard football game, or a race-track feature like the Kentucky Derby. Forty thousand people at least crammed the high stands which stretched three-quarters of the way around the third-mile track. The infield, green and level as a billiard table, a cricket grounds with turf that seemed alive under the feet, held between two and three thousand more. It was a soft summer day, and the gay dresses of the women and their brilliant scarfs and parasols supplied splashes of color that stood out vividly against the background of trees which lay behind the stands.

The crowd waited impatiently through the three or four events—amateur races—which preceded the running of the Thousand. Then, when some eight riders, including champion Neale, appeared for the first elimination heat of the big race, a great hush fell on the arena. Nearly every person in the grounds had a betting interest in the Thousand, and they sat on the edges of their seats, fidgeting about nervously, their eyes glued to the little line of riders that extended from the starting line a hundred yards or so around the wide, slightly banked track. And when Neale rushed through the last half furlong of the first heat like a man with wings, coming from nowhere, as the saying is, to flash by the field and win by inches, the crowd went wild. Neale was a top-heavy favorite, and his supporters yelled their throats out when he won his right to race in the finals.

Thacker, natural second choice in the betting, won the next heat without exerting himself. Then came three heats which went to the long handicap boys, and, in the sixth and last canto of the preliminaries, Lonny took the track.

I must admit he looked anything but formidable as he strolled out of the training quarters. His right arm, just loosed from the sling, hung crooked and stiff, and Lonny was walking with a bent-backed, limp stride that suggested a physical wreck. When he mounted his bike, he bent over the handlebars in a lopsided way and he screwed up his face as though suffering pain from the sudden strain he was putting on his "injured" shoulder.

"Don't overdo that acting stuff, Lonny," I whispered to him. "You'll queer the game. When you get going, you'll forget all about the bum wing you are supposed to have and then everybody will know that——"

"No fear of it!" he interrupted somewhat angrily. "My arm's stiff as blazes from that damn sling. Wish I'd took it off sooner."

"I told you that you——"

"Aw, shut up!" he growled. "You're always there with the advice after the job's done!"

And I'll confess that I was bothered a little myself when Lonny slowed up, as though thankfully, after catching the field. It looked like bum judgment to me, trailing the gang instead of working up to a position where he could start his sprint for the finish. When the bell clanged for the last lap, the leaders put everything on and set sail. Lonny was off with the rest, but he had to swing high to get around when the others bunched as riders always do in the last lap of a bike race that's close at all. It was close figuring, but Lonny made it, winning by a half foot over a stocky rider named Hume who seemed to have the heat sewed up as he turned into the homestretch.

I ran out to help Lonny off his bike. Even in dismounting he failed to forget that he was cast that day for the part of a poor, weak invalid; for he looked actually gray and nauseated as he swung from the saddle, and he staggered away with the stumbling footsteps of a drunken man. I helped his game along by throwing my arm around him and supporting him under the armpits, while wheeling his bike along with my other hand.

"But you needn't break my back," I protested as he leaned almost his whole weight on me. "Remember—I'm only a little guy!"

Lonny grinned sickishly and put some of his weight on his own feet in the rest of the trip to the training quarters.

There were three or four events between Lonny's heat and the final of the Thousand —just about enough time to give Lonny a good rub, which is the job I busied myself on. For the benefit of the other riders in the training quarters Lonny let loose a few groans, complained of his shoulder bothering him, did a little mild cussing, and then, pretending to feel faint, he set up a loud wail for whisky. He'd never monkeyed with the hard stuff any, but I thought it would be plugging the game right if I dug some up for him. I borrowed half a pint or so from an Australian trainer, intending to put it where it would do Lonny the most good, and I'll let you guess where that was; but Lonny would have none of that. He grabbed the bottle from me, and, before a could get it back, he had guzzled half the booze.

"You boob!" I called him. "You're not used to that stuff. You won't be able to sit on your wheel!"

"Huh!" he snorted. "Watch me! The stuff will just fix me up." And when the call came for the final of the Thousand, Lonny got up from his bench with more energy that he'd shown all day.

"Easy, there!" I cautioned him. "Remember—you're supposed to be sick!"

"That's right; I am!" and he slouched again into the weak-kneed gait he'd used in his previous journey to the track. We got to the trackside, Lonny walking ahead, me bringing up the rear with the bike.

Suddenly I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned and looked into the fox face of Joe Driscoll, manager of the track. "Beg pardon," he said with such a slop-over of politeness and such a queer, crooked smile that I shivered. "A word with you," he requested.

"Er, your man, Adair——" he said, hesitatinglike and grinning at me mockingly. "It strikes me he's performing in a remarkably —er—creditable manner for a man who's not yet—er—fully recovered from—er—from a serious and painful accident."

Then he winked wisely, and I felt myself going pale.

"Great Godfrey!" I thought. "We're nabbed! Somebody's got hep to the bets that guy Taylor's been making! Or maybe Lonny's made some fool move that a bird with a real busted shoulder coulda't!"

But I gave Driscoll the laugh.

"Ho, ho, ho!" I bellowed at him. "You don't know Lonny, that's all! Why, a broken shoulder doesn't mean any more to him—he's a husky, he is—a—a superman! Yes, you can't figure Lonny the way you would an ordinary fellow. Ha, ha! Gosh—no! Ha, ha!"

He stood there blinking at me with the coldest eyes I ever looked into.

"That's all very well," he said. "But here in Australia we are most anxious to—er—to safeguard the—er—purity of sport. We——"

"I noticed that!" I couldn't help telling him. "You did it to Lonny by letting your pet riders bump him all over the track! You——"

"I don't intend to argue with you," he told me, cutting in. "Somebody has re-

called that after the—the accident to Adair, he was—er—spirited away from the Sydney track. The track surgeon had no opportunity to examine him. Mind you, I'm not insinuating anything, but——"

"You'd better not!" I blazed, bluffing for all I was worth. "What's the idea anyway? You don't mean to say you think Lonny *didn't* hurt himself? Don't tell me *that!* Get out your track surgeon!" I dared him. "Let him look Lonny over—now!"

He shook his head.

"Oh, no," he said easily. "Not now. After the race—if it's necessary."

"What d'you mean—necessary?" I barked at him.

"You should know," he told me, turning away. "You're a man of—er—judgment."

It wasn't until a couple of weeks later that I learned that friend Driscoll was down for over a thousand bucks on Neale to win the race, but I got his point all right. He wanted me to tip Lonny off not to win—even if he could, which I'll admit I doubted. If he did win, they'd sic a doctor on him, find out that Lonny's shoulder was no more broken than mine, disqualify him for practicing deceit, concealing his true form—something like that—and bar him from cycle racing for life in the bargain.

I'll tell you I was as sick as Lonny pretended to be when I caught up with him. "Well," asked Lonny cheerfully, "what did old frosty heart have to say?"

I told him. "And, for the love of all that's holy, Lonny," I finished, "don't win! Lay down, if you have to. Don't be a fool!" I begged.

"Fool—yourself!" he barked back. "D'you think I'd throw Taylor down? He's put himself in hock for life to——"

"Damn Taylor!" I cut in. "He's just a gambler. He's done nothing for you. It's just the money that pulled him to you. He'd throw *you* down in a minute. He——"

The voice of the starter, sarcastically inquiring whether we were there to ride a bicycle race or just to talk things over, cut me short. I gave Lonny a lift onto his wheel. There was nothing else for me to do. He tightened his pedal straps, bent down over his handlebars, and we were ready.

I gave Lonny as honest a start as I could. As in the preliminary heat, he was slow about getting under way. In the first half lap he hadn't made up an inch on Neale and Thacker. In fact, I'd say that both the scratch men had increased their twenty-yard advantage a little, but both they and Lonny had advanced all of twenty yards on the rest of the field. When Lonny shot by me for the first lap, though, he had crept five yards closer to the native stars, and he was moving up on them with every revolution of the pedals. The same painful, almost ghastly expression he had worn in the trial heat had returned to his face. I shook my head. You can't put over a broken collar bone on a doctor who knows his business!

The next half lap brought Lonny five yards closer to Neale and Thacker, and the three of them right on top of the rest of the field. The spectators, who at bike races usually keep their enthusiasm for the last yards of a contest, were on their feet screeching.

As the riders rumbled into the last round Thacker and Neale, who, by exchanging pace, had made their chase of the field easy, swung up the track and began to run over the leaders. As they flashed by, a couple of the stronger near stars tagged on and moved up with them. Lonny, who had pedaled on alone and unaided since the crack of the gun, was hanging out distress signals at this point. But when he saw the scratch men working for position he found the strength somewhere to make up the five yards that separated him from the rest of the field. Then he swung up the track and started after Neale and Thacker.

The roar from the stands and the infield was deafening. Never anywhere else have I seen sport enthusiasts raised to such a pitch of frenzy. Every man spectator was temporarily a lunatic, and the women were screaming hysterically.

A red-headed cyclist named Briscoe, who, owing to the fact that he'd had the longest handicap, had been leading the field all the way, decided he had had enough, rode off onto the flat and quit. Three others dropped out within the next two hundred yards and that left eight to contest the last eighth mile. Lonny was in sixth position at this juncture, twenty yards behind the leaders, ten yards behind Neale and Thacker who were moving to the van in a rush which was not to be denied.

I'm for Lonny twenty-four hours a day, over mountains and across rivers, but I'll admit that I sighed with relief when it seemed to me that his goose was cooked. Suppose he did lose? Suppose he never got

his hands on the young fortune which the race meant to him? What of it? Wasn't that better than being barred from the game?

And then my heart jumped. I gasped and craned my neck out over the trackside to watch the riders shooting down toward me through the stretch.

Thacker and Neale were still in front and still side by side, neither with an inch advantage over the other, but, behind them, his back humped, his legs working like pistons, his bike swaying and shaking unevenly from the tremendous drive that was being applied to his pedals came Lonny—a crimson streak; and he was overhauling Neale and Thacker!

Inch by inch, so slowly that the short drive through the stretch seemed to last an eternity, Lonny crept up. His yellow head, wagging from side to side, seemed almost to brush his front tire, so low was he bending over the bars. His stiff right arm, which he had favored all through the rest of the race, stretched to his grip in a normal crook.

I forgot Driscoll and his threatening hint of disqualification. I forgot everything except that Lonny Adair, the grandest, gamest kid that ever sat a bicycle, was dashing through the stretch—and had a chance.

"Come on, Lonny!" I yelled, waving my arms, jumping up and down like a fellow winning his first bet on a horse race. "Oh, Lonny! Lonny!"

I don't know where he got it. It might have been the shot of rum he'd insisted on drinking that gave him the extra strength he needed. It might have been just desperation; maybe just his own natural gameness and stamina—but Lonny *came!*

Ten yards from the finish line he caught Thacker and Neale, and then there were three of them locked instead of two. Five yards from the tape no judge that I ever heard of would have dared to pick a winner from among them. You've heard of dead heats and blanket finishes? You could have covered the backs of those three with a towel!

A yard from the black line—no, by gum, it couldn't have been more than a foot—Lonny's bike seemed to rise from the track and plunge forward through the air. And he *won.* It wasn't by more than the width of a tire, but there was no room for doubt as I could see from the faces and gestures of the judges as I whirled around to look into their stand. And as I turned I saw fox-faced Joe Driscoll dart in among the judges, shaking with excitement, stuttering out the question that was uppermost in his mind: "Who won? Who gets it?"

I boiled over. Rules or no rules, and no matter what charges of sharp practices they could bring up against Lonny—to disqualify him after that race would have been a crime. Grand larceny, highway robbery, or piracy wouldn't have come within miles of covering it. For, if ever a race had been won fairly, squarely, honestly, and by superior riding, stamina and courage, with not a trace of trickery from start to finish, it was that one.

I rushed over to the judges' stand. "Driscoll," I screeched, "you want to be damn careful what you——"

A roar from the stand drowned my words. Driscoll, who had been leaning over the rail regarding me with a cold, sneaky, contemptuous smile that I longed to wipe off his skinny face with my fist, suddenly straightened. The judges jumped to their feet. All turned and, following the eyes of the mob in the stands, gazed toward the backstretch.

I ducked around the edge of the stand to see across the infield and some instinct led me to keep right on going. There was a crowd of riders, trainers, and spectators dashing toward a point on the track a little more than a hundred yards from the finish line. I plunged in among them, elbowed my way through, vaulted over the low fence that surrounded the infield, and when I reached the track I found—Lonny. Sprawled on the boards he lay, one foot still strapped to a pedal, his right arm twisted under him, blood gushing from a great gash in his forehead and his face the color of death.

Somebody got him loose from his bicycle, and we carried him, a limp, dead weight to the training quarters. This time it was the track surgeon who examined him, and the first place on Lonny's body he reached for was the right shoulder.

"Uh," he grunted after running his fingers along the length of the shoulder blade and pressing them in, "it's cracked; no mistake about that."

I dashed out of the training quarters, over to the judges' stand, and laughed in Driscoll's face.

"Driscoll," I said, "I guess you needn't bother about having them disqualify my boy. You'd have a swell time proving that the busted shoulder he's got now wasn't with him for the last two weeks!"

And as I spoke, a trainer came up with the news that the track surgeon reported Lonny injured, and Driscoll, registering disgust, disappointment, and fourteen different kinds of grouch, waved his hands to the judges as a sign that he O. K.'d the result of the race as it was ridden.

It wasn't until that night that I got a chance at a private word with Lonny. He was in his bed in the hotel, bandaged like a mummy but grinning like a kid under a Christmas tree, and the reason for the grin was in his free hand—forty-three thousand bucks' worth of pretty, crinkly bank notes, which had just been dumped out of a big, black satchel by Jerry Taylor—and there was still the prize money from the Adelaide Thousand to be collected in the morning!

"Lonny," I said, "it may seem like kind of a queer thing to say—but it was a goldarned lucky tumble you took this afternoon! If you hadn't cracked that old suspender rack of yours to-day they'd have put you on the ground for life—sure!"

"Windy," he grinned, "you're a wise guy! You're so wise that you ought to have a keeper! On the level—didn't you know I busted my shoulder when I did that dive at Sydney?"

"Sydney?" I gasped.

"Sure!" guffawed Lonny. "I made the fall too good—and it was *real!* D'you think I'd have been wearin' that danged sling *to bed* if I didn't have to?"

"Then you——"

"I thought the bone was knit good enough to last the race out to-day, but it wasn't—it cracked again when I started my last sprint. And—did it hurt! Windy, I'm tellin' the truth when I say everything went black on me before we hit the stretch. I—I didn't know whether I'd finished first, fifth, last—or at all—until they brought me to down in the trainin' quarters and told me. I——"

I couldn't stand any more. Honest, if I'd listened further I think I'd have cried—or kissed Lonny—or pulled some equally damfool trick. I grabbed up all of Lonny's dough and bundled it into a towel.

Earn it? I'll say he did!

A great baseball story, "The Beard of Jeremiah," by Raymond J. Brown in the next number.

THE PLOW AS A WEATHER MAKER

FROM the beginning of the race man has been trying to control the caprices of the weather. Even among most primitive tribes the black art of rainmaking is a well-established profession, albeit a precarious one—the mortality rate running high in time of drought. We of the twentieth century have largely outgrown our early trust in wizardry. And yet, a dry spell—a long dry spell—has power to revive in us a primitive faith in the weather man.

Only recently a professional rainmaker brought suit against a Western city for a ten-thousand-dollar fee. In a drought he had offered to fill the city's dried-up reservoir for a price. The council agreed—jocularly, it was claimed in the answer to the suit. Within a week came the biggest rain on record. It filled the reservoir and washed away the dam, and with it ranches and villages. But after due deliberation, a jury decided the rain was purely an act of God.

Although we cannot yet summons the clouds at will, we have quite an effective maker of weather in the plow. Thus it was the advent of the plow into Kansas and Eastern Nebraska that so increased the rainfall as to transform that arid land into a crop country. But, perhaps, its most spectacular achievement has been the change it has wrought during the last few years in the climate of the Canadian Northwest, including the banishing of the summer frosts.

The scientific explanation of the plow's effect upon the climate is this: The sun could not penetrate the heavy growth of vegetation that shaded the ground, consequently the earth had no chance to absorb and store up solar heat. But when the land was cleared and plowed and the sun's rays could shine direct upon the bare earth, sufficient heat was stored up to raise the summer temperature a few degrees, which was enough to keep it above the frost line while the wheat was growing, except in abnormal years.

The Dam

By Roy Norton

Author of "A Pair of Fools," "The Secret City," Etc.

The third exploit of David and Goliath, the oddly matched pair of miners and adventurers, brings them up against the problem of damming up a river bed and getting gold out of it with only Chinese laborers to help them. Any miner will understand that the game is not the simplest to beat

FOR so long had the partners, Jim O. Leath and David Field, been known as "David and Goliath" over the Pacific-swept coast, from the tropics to the arctics, that they themselves might have forgotten their other names. Hence on that hot morning in Georgetown, when Goliath, six feet seven, stood looking over the head of David, five feet one, through the post-office wicket, the girl behind merely smiled and threw a single letter into David's stubby, practical hands, and David promptly retired against the wall and tore it open without concerning himself as to the address.

"Well," he said, at last, after perusing it. "That's good news. Of course we'll go. Um-m-mh! By the way, this letter's for you."

Goliath, entirely unperturbed, accepted and read it:

SIR: Having heard that you are at present out of employment through the closing down of the Eldorado Mine, and being in need of a practical miner, qualified to act as superintendent for some work I have just been compelled to carry on, I should appreciate it if you will either call upon or write me in care of the Auburn House, Auburn, California. If you are still out of employment, a personal call would be best to save time. Yours truly,

M. E. SLOAN.

Goliath appeared unelated. "Tough luck," he said. "He doesn't mention you, and—of course that settles it."

"Oh, that's all right," David declared. "Maybe the trouble will then be that he won't want you. Come on. Let's get the noon stage for Auburn."

On arrival in Auburn they repaired to the hotel and Goliath asked the first person they met, who happened to be a rather mischievous bell hop, if he could take them to M. E. Sloan.

"Hardly, but I can bring M. E. Sloan to you," said the boy, mimicking Goliath's rumble. "Come in here and sit down," and he conducted them to a luxurious lounge room in which the partners felt as uncomfortable as a pair of bears suddenly ushered into the midst of a glass palace. They sat gingerly on the edges of two big plush chairs, silent, twisting their hats, and staring at their surroundings, until they were startled by the entrance of what might have been described as a first-class, clean, wholesome, tailor-made young woman of perhaps twenty-five years of age, whose clear eyes scrutinized them appraisingly.

"Come on, Dave, let's wait outside. This ain't no place for us—hang that boy!" muttered Goliath, suddenly hoisting his great frame upward and preparing to vacate.

"Pardon me," the girl's voice arrested him. "I think you must be Mr. Leath. You came in answer to my letter."

"Good Lord! I thought Sloan was—was a he-man!" exclaimed Goliath in surprise, and then she laughed, exposing what David thought were the most perfect teeth he had ever seen, between perfect lips, and with his customary readiness to accept such a rôle he instantly made himself master of ceremonies.

"His name's Leath, all right, Miss Sloan; but he's so bashful when women are around that—humph—most always he totes a guitar or a banjo or a mandolin and sings to 'em to prove that he ain't dumb. I'm his partner. Field's my name."

"Oh," she said with another smile of amusement. "I believe you are the man called David. David and Goliath, every one calls you, I think."

"That's us, ma'am!" said Goliath, finding his speech. "We always travel together,

work together, maybe fight together. I couldn't come without him, you see, and he——"

"So here we are, miss," David cheerfully finished for him. "Now—about this job of yours—fire away. We're lookin' for somethin', me and Goliath are. Whatchu got?"

He was such a short, broad, self-confident, and belligerent chunk of a man, with such round, direct, and searching eyes, and so homely in contrast with the splendidly proportioned Goliath, who was black-haired, dark-eyed, and entirely handsome, that the incongruity of their partnership overwhelmed her and she sank into a chair and vainly endeavored to subdue her laughter. Goliath grinned happily. David scowled and glowered from beneath the red thatch of his eyebrows.

"Miss," he said, "my pardner is all man—the finest and biggest-hearted that ever walked in man's-size shoes. He cain't help bein' big and ugly. He was born that way. I don't allow nobody, man or woman, to laugh at Jim or make fun of Jim. We're goin', now, him and me is."

"But—but I wasn't laughing at him. I was laughing at you!" Miss Sloan exclaimed, and for a moment longer he glared, then his face changed from wrath to content and he finally grinned.

"Oh, well—that way it's all right," he said. "So, now we've got this thing straight, maybe I'd better go outside and wait until you two get through with this deal."

Miss Sloan lifted a protesting hand.

"No, don't go," she said. "I can use both of you," and smiled at the look of relief that came into the partners' faces, and went on to explain the nature of the work. Her only brother, a mining engineer, had invested his and her money in a plan to dam temporarily one branch of the American River, and carry its water in a flume over a considerable stretch of river bed that was known to contain gold values in the bed rock. When the river bed was exposed it could be worked.

"Just two weeks ago," she said in a lowered voice, "my brother had a complete nervous breakdown, and the specialists told me that the sole chance of saving his life was to get him completely away from it all; that he must drop everything. He is now on his way to the Hawaiian Islands where it is more than probable he will have to remain for at least a year."

She stopped, and the partners saw that her lips were quivering. They admired her bravery, for they were sympathetic to the point of foolishness. For an instant they were highly embarrassed, and both hoped that she wasn't going to cry, which would have been decidedy awkward. So they averted their eyes, and twisted their hats still more, and voiced gruff "ahems!"

"We have invested about everything we have in this project," she said, rallying herself to the business in hand, "so, to lose it, would be—would be very serious." She hesitated and drew a deep breath before she continued: "You see the worst of it is that the whole success of the plan devolves on its being done in a single summer season, because the fall rains and freshets must inevitably sweep everything away. Everything! All our money included. So that work mustn't stop. It must go on. It's got to go on!"

They were watching her and had stopped twirling their hats. She lifted her eyes slowly and tried to smile.

"So I made up my mind to step in and save the wreck—somehow—and—I've got to have help, because, of course, I'm not a miner. I came up here and talked with a man who is my brother's friend, and he said—he said that the only man he knew of that was not engaged and who could put that work through was you, Mr. Leath. He said he knew you by reputation only, but that from all he could learn you were the ideal man to take charge of it. Please do it—for me. You don't know what it means for us—my brother and me. If this fails, I don't see how on earth I can earn money to cure him and—he is so helpless now, and—maybe you could tell me what I ought to pay you for all that? I don't know a thing on earth about such affairs as this and you do, and——"

"Oh, to hell with the money part of it!" rumbled Goliath, not even aware of his break. "Me and Dave don't always think of money, do we, Dave?"

"Not when we've got anything better to think about," David answered, his habitual caution fighting with his desire to help any one in distress. "I reckon—well—if we could pull it through I guess maybe we'd be entitled to something a little better than day wages, and, if we didn't—humph, miss, we could all go busted together, couldn't we? It'd most likely be harder on you than us,

because Jim and me's used to it. Sure we'll take a chance and look it over, and see what can be done. Eh, pardner, how does that strike you?"

Goliath made deep growls and internal noises that indicated his whole-hearted assent, and then, towering above Miss Sloan, said comfortingly: "Don't you worry no more about it. Me and Dave'll do all we can to help you out and—miss, I tell you that Dave ain't much to look at, but he's just one of the very best there is. Dave's got brains, and—I furnish the meat and bone in this outfit. We're your men."

There was something so simple and direct in this declaration that Miss Sloan looked up at him gratefully, and then with growing respect and curiosity at the stocky, ugly little man at his side, who, at that moment, resembled a stunted gorilla more than a depository of brains, and then, to her further wonderment, the ugly little man appeared distinctly embarrassed and spluttered, irascibly: "What's the use of all this gab! Tell us where we go, miss, and let's get on the job. Talk's all right, but—doin' something's what gets you somewhere. We've agreed to go. That settles that. We're takin' chances along with you. If we make good, we get our share. If we don't make good, you don't. Now, quit bein' a fool woman, and get down to bed rock! You got to do that first of all. You're a grown-up person, and ought to know it. Jim and me has always been afflicted with females—some of 'em young, and some of 'em—not so young. But we're takin' one chance more. Lead us to this place where we can see what's got to be done, and if there's anything at all worth doing."

Miss Sloan was not quite sure whether she liked or hated David when the partners made their departure; but she had agreed to have a conveyance ready for them in two hours, and to personally conduct them to the scene of operations. What she did not tell them was that she proposed to live on that scene to avoid the expenses of living in a hotel, and had she done so, it is more than likely that the partners would have immediately backed out and fled to the wilds.

The partners had vaguely expected to find a tiny camp on the border of a river in a half-mountainous flat, a camp with perhaps five or six men loitering about until the fate of their future efforts could be decided. They had expected to find a few ragged canvas tents for shelter and a work scarcely begun. They had hoped to find supplies on hand to provide a few meals, and had quietly discussed the advisability of taking with them some beans, bacon, and flour; but fortunately had decided that in any event there should be sufficient to last them until they could fill out orders for what they wanted, and so went light. Their new employer sat beside the driver, and her attempts at conversation were not very effective. David smoked steadily, Goliath puffed away with equal steadiness. David was thoughtful, Goliath absorbed in the scenery. And then, late in the summer evening, they swung from the narrow, constantly ascending road in a magnificent gorge out into a tiny flat where the river had dawdled as if for a rest, and saw their new camp.

On either side towered great hills, robed and softened with forests and verdant underbrush. Here and there the rugged, time-worn, barren cliffs lifted gray peaks in miniature. In the tiny valley through whose heart the river loitered languidly, as if breathing for succeeding plunges in its frantic rush seaward, they saw temporary cabins, bunk houses, and mess houses, built of galvanized iron and tar paper, adequately windowed and doored, crude tram lines of light iron, high tiers of lumber and timber gleaming a dull yellow in the cañon's dusk, and in the upper distance the high breastwork of a dam over whose central lip the water roared in a great cascade that caught the twilight reds and browns and dull flashes of departing light. At the opposite of this valley a great yellow structure of pine supported by coarse timbers, began at the edge of the dam and, like a broken centipede, sprawled along the contours of the gorge's base as if seeking to escape from its lower end. A shrill whistle tore the stillness of the hills and echoed backward and forward down the cañon.

"It is six o'clock," Miss Sloan said, turning back toward the partners. "That is the whistle up at the little sawmill above. My brother made his own timber for the work from forests up on the side that he bought. Pretty soon you will see the gang coming in. You men will, of course, stop in my brother's cabin—up there to the right, driver. The right-hand road. This one goes on up the river."

"The gang? What gang do you mean, miss," David asked.

"The men from the sawmill. They're all

white," she said, and then seeing the look of bewilderment on the partners' faces, added: "Oh, yes! I forgot to tell you that all the men my brother worked down on the flume are Chinese."

"Great Scott!" groaned Goliath. "Chinks!"

"I believe they do call them that," Miss Sloan assented. "But they are all my brother could get—labor is so scarce up here."

"Then—then why in Sam Hill aren't they at work?" Goliath demanded.

"I don't know. I suppose its because there was no one here to make them, since my brother left," she said dubiously. "It can't be that its because they are dissatisfied. They were paid off in full three days ago."

"Come on, Dave," suddenly rumbled Goliath, and jumped from the mountain wagon over the slowly turning wheel, David instantly following his example.

Before Miss Sloan could express her astonishment they were tramping hastily down the slope toward the mess house. As they approached they heard a confused murmuring and jabbering with here and there a voice shrilly raised as if stirred into excitement.

"I thought so!" grimly remarked Goliath, as he stepped inside the mess-house door and halted. "Here's the answer!"

One whole end of a long mess table was surrounded by coolies whose backs were turned toward the door, and so absorbed were they in what was going on before them that they were not even aware of the partners' entrance. The steady click-click of counters and thumping iron bowls told the story.

"Fan-tan! Quit work the minute they got paid off and there was no one to keep 'em at it—and everything here a fight for time!" growled Goliath, and then with a sudden angry start he rushed forward. He caught the nearest players and threw them aside like straws until he could reach the dealer, whom he suddenly clutched by both shoulders and hoisted into the air, shaking him like a rat.

"I reckon," Goliath shouted, "from the look of you, that you're a visitor who just about came up here with your layout to trim these Chinese boys. Well, I'll trim off your pigtail and your ears with it, if ever I catch you on these works again."

The dealer squealed with fright, and in perfect San Francisco Chinatown English proved that Goliath's surmise had been correct. He was carried, kicking and squirming, out of the mess house and to the road. There he was unceremoniously dropped on his feet and given a mighty kick that assisted him to a flying start.

A very much subdued Canton man came forward making obsequious gestures.

"Me boss," he explained.

"You, eh? Well, you tell this gang of yours that I mean business. From now on there'll be more work and less fan-tan here. You come up to my cabin, chop-chop. I want to get this thing straightened out right now. Sabe?"

"Me sabe," the foreman said respectfully.

And thus did Goliath take masterful charge of his new work, and the partners tramped upward toward their new cabin.

When they entered the comfortably fitted, although flimsy cabin, they were again astonished; for therein they found M. E. Sloan clad in a denim slip-over preparing their evening meal.

"Hereafter," she announced, "I am going to do your cooking, and incidentally my own."

"But—but——" protested David, looking at her deft, white hands as she continued her task.

"No buts about it," she interrupted cheerfully. "In a way, you see, we are partners from now on. Out back, in that lean-to, you will find a wash basin and soap and towel and a pail of water. By the time you are cleaned up, supper will be ready."

Meekly, like a pair of obedient schoolboys, they trudged out to the lean-to.

"Well, I'll be danged!" gasped David.

"So'll I!" whispered Goliath.

"We're in for it, all right," said David, almost tearfully.

"We sure are," agreed Goliath.

But to them the supper to which they seated themselves a few minutes later seemed remarkably luxurious.

"Tastes like—like home cookin', miss," said David trying to be polite.

"It sure does, miss," said Goliath, blinking his eyes.

And that was nearly all the conversation she could get from them until after the meal was cleared away by a Chinese mess boy; but she was aware that they were appraising her, and before the evening passed and she retired to her adjoining cabin, had succeeded in somewhat thawing their reserve. Before they were up in the morning they

heard her preparing breakfast. They agreed that this was "mighty good" of her, and told her so—between huge mouthfuls.

It was not until the weekly pay roll came due that they asked her anything regarding her financial condition, and perhaps they would not have dared then but for the fact that her face, as she scanned the time book beneath the glare of the lamp, betrayed perturbation.

"Dave and me hoped, miss," said Goliath anxiously, "that you don't mind all this overtime we're runnin' in. It's a right big increase on operatin' costs, but—that work's got to be done fast, or it'll never get done at all."

"I know that," she said, and then, in a burst of girlish confidence, added: "But it has cost so much more than my brother ever thought it would that—oh, dear—I don't know where we are to get enough money if this keeps up, unless we can begin to take something out pretty soon."

Goliath and David stared at the ceiling a long time before David clumped both feet on the floor, cleared his throat loudly, and said: "Well, miss, as far as Goliath and me's concerned, you needn't pay us unless we can take it out. We don't need money, but —we might as well know where we stand. How much money have you got?"

"A little less than three thousand dollars."

"Um-m-m-h!" said David, massaging his close-cropped red head with his hard fingers. "And its costin' a hundred a day without countin' me and my pardner's wages, and it'll take thirty days more at least before we can hope to have bare bed rock, and——"

Miss Sloan's distress became more apparent as he continued.

"Dave, you shut up!" suddenly rumbled Goliath. "Ain't you got any manners? What do you want to go troublin' her for? You never mind, miss. Don't you go to worryin'. He's a croaker, he is."

"But he has told the truth, hasn't he? It's going to be a gamble, as well as a race against time, if we are to win out at all, isn't it?" she insisted.

Goliath twisted in his seat as if uncomfortable and then said, as if unwillingly: "Well, I reckon you might as well know the truth. It is a gamble with some of the odds against us. But if only the Lord Almighty'll keep the weather dry and give us a late fall season, we can maybe make good—providin' of course, that the sand in the bed of the river's got plenty gold in it. If I thought I had any pull with the Lord, miss, I reckon I'd pray for it to keep dry a long, long time."

"Now, what's the good of your scarin' Miss Sloan up that a way?" demanded David hotly. "Miss, don't you take no stock in what he says! He always was one of these here pessimists."

And that night after they were alone they abused each other like a pair of enemies looking for a fight, and it ended as usual, in their unanimous declaration that they must get more work out of that gang and do more themselves. Goliath was almost asleep when he heard a triumphant whisper: "Hey, Jim! I know what the first part of her name is: Marthy Ellen!" And so after that they privately referred to her as "Miss Marthy" or "Marthy Ellen."

And from that day began a race against time, in which, as the partners progressed, their anxiety augmented. It was as if their sympathies for "Miss Marthy's" difficulties increased day by day. They began work hours ahead of their men, they worked long after the others, dead beaten, had knocked off. They drove others remorselessly, but still more remorselessly drove themselves. Finally the girl expostulated with them.

"You're killing the men and yourselves—for—for me!" she declared.

"Kill nothin', Miss Marthy," David blurted. "Why, Lord bless you! this ain't nothin' at all to what my pardner and me has done, and what we could do if it came to a pinch. The fact is, we're more or less lazy. Ain't that so, Jim?"

But when he received no reply and looked around to discover the reason, he saw that the giant had fallen asleep in the corner from exhaustion. He looked gravely at the girl, put his fingers on his lips, beckoned her to the door, and when outside said: "I didn't want to wake him up with my yawpin', miss, but—you see he ain't as strong as I am, though he's so much bigger. And he did do a right smart lot of work this last few days. It's me, miss, that's the loafer in this team of ours. Goliath, as you calls him—Goliath, miss, works like hell! So you don't mind goin' home now, do you, and lettin' him sleep? He don't mean to be imperlite. He just naturally couldn't help goin' to sleep, I reckon."

His own steps lagged heavily as he turned back to the cabin and she saw through the open door how solicitously he tiptoed into

the room, and then, after consideration, gently aroused the sleeping giant and sent him to bed.

Yet drive through every working hour as they did, the great flume was not prepared for its burden within three weeks of the time for which they had hoped, and already they had endured one afternoon of agony when the clouds gathered and gently disgorged themselves of rain. The partners fought their apprehensions and worked all the more doggedly, drenched to their skins, looking now at the open lip of the dam through which the waters charged more heavily, and then upward at the skies. When the shower passed they accepted it as a warning to make still greater haste, and now their men threatened to revolt. When Miss Sloan's funds were exhausted they accompanied her to Auburn and staked their reputations with the banker for an advance of money, after which, feeling empowered to spend more, they increased the working hours, threatening death and damnation to any man who either growled, shirked, or threw up his job.

They did not exult even at the first yellowing in the riffles. They were too worn and tired to waste breath, and their sole cry was, "Work! Work! Work!" from dawn till night, when stiff, bent, and aching throughout every bone and muscle of their bodies they fell into their bunks until life was a nightmare of unending toil in which they, hollow-eyed and gaunt, mercilessly drove hollow-eyed, gaunt Chinese to further effort. They did not so much as spare the time to measure their clean-ups, or to work their amalgam of quicksilver and gold to find what values they were taking. All they cared for was to see their store increase, to clear one section of bedrock, hoist the sluices, reset them, and attack another. Sometimes they wondered, vaguely, how much gold they had recovered, and usually muttered speculations concerning the quantity of "pay."

"I don't reckon the ground is runnin' so all-fired rich," grumbled Dave, in one of these frequent discussions after a clean-up. "But it'll be a lot better than nothin'."

"Don't know about that," replied Goliath. "We ran into a patch of ground to-day that looked to me as if it was mighty rich, and yesterday evenin' struck one crevice that was so deep I spooned it and must have got about an ounce to the handful."

"The most likely lookin' spot to me is that one over on the left-hand rim, just below where the current used to hit the bank and bounce off," mumbled David.

And so for days it continued. They were not even aware that the girl had gradually taken over a greater share of work until she was not only cooking for them, but had dispensed with the mess boy. Not content with this she appeared when they made their clean-ups and insisted on learning how to help them. Reluctantly they accepted this service in their race against time, and the sight of her, in her short smock with miner's rubber boots, was as familiar as that of any other employee. The sawmill had been shut down, its work done, and, lured by the promise of extravagant wages, its gang of white men was induced to take to picks and shovels. Unbeknown to David and Goliath it was well for them that this little leavening of white men were there, for the hard-driven Chinese were ripe for anything from rebellion to murder.

And thus matters stood on that day of fall when clouds swept up from the southeast and blotted out the noonday sun. All through the afternoon they continued to gather, sullen, heavy, and menacing. A soft, warm breeze moved the branches of the forests up against the sky lines on the borders of the cañon. Now and then it paused, and the trees appeared expectant and waiting. Sounds were magnified in those intervals of stillness, until the shrill songs of birds took on new tones, the voices of the men, muttering, became shouts, and the very crash of picks ripping into the half-disintegrated slate, and the clash of shovel as the sand and rubble were thrown into the sluices sounded like miniature explosions. Darkness fell so early that the men ceased work a full hour earlier than usual; but David and Goliath toiled on.

In the end they compromised by agreeing that David would take the night watch until one o'clock in the morning at which hour he was to call Goliath for relief. At three o'clock a. m., Goliath, subconsciously determined to arouse himself, turned wearily in his bunk, sat up, fumbled for a box of matches, struck a light, and looked at his watch. Less than ten minutes later a stocky little man, who was trudging around at the foot of the dam and striving to keep awake by studying the threats of the skies, was disturbed by the sounds of boot heels running over rocks and a bellowed shout, "Dave! Dave! Where are you?"

"Aside from about four splashes there ain't been a drop of rain yet," David answered. "Nothin' to get fussed up about. You're twice as big as I am, and so that's why you oughter sleep twice as long as I have to."

But when he had been pushed and shoved away into the gloom and his dragging feet carried him to the cabin, he merely succeeded in reaching his bunk before he fell asleep. He was awakened by a crash of thunder, and by the sounds of thrashing rain that beat against the galvanized iron roof and walls. It was daylight; a daylight of storm. Heedless of a certain wetting, he plunged from the cabin. Down below he saw forms running here and there, and heard the sodden ring of axes felling trees, the shouts and curses of men in stress, and immediately observed that they were at work on the dam. The great flume was filled and overflowing its sides, but the dam still stood, diverting the torrent. He saw, towering above all others, the giant. Now the figure stood still in the very center of the dam as if gauging its strength, now it hastened to a group of men who were hastily building great buttresses of logs and stone below.

David ran down the path with the rain lashing his face at intervals and encountered a smock-garbed, wearily advancing feminine figure.

"David—Dave!" she cried, intercepting him. "Stop him from risking not only his own life but those of his men. I tried to get him to rest and call them off, and wait for—for whatever comes—but—he wouldn't listen! The dam doesn't matter! The sluice boxes don't matter! All that matters is that——"

"For the love of Heaven, Marthy, get out of the way!" he cried and ran past her, furiously intent on doing his part to prevent catastrophe. Her voice followed him, broken by the savage winds that whipped and tore the forests and then seemed to swoop malevolently downward into the cañon to assist the flood in wiping out the man-made marks below. It was as if all the elements had revolted at the desecration of their domain and had united to assist the river in regaining its natural course. David had almost reached his goal when he heard the roaring voice of the giant shouting a warning.

"Run! Run for your lives! Get to the banks, boys, she's giving! She's going! Run! For God's sake—run!"

And then, as if its cumulative effort had brought victory, the river charged, there was a wild crashing of timbers broken, of logs upended, of earthwork and bowldered buttress ground under, and the dam gave way, releasing a flood that instantaneously obliterated the great flume as if it were paper, and —the river had returned to its course.

In an agony of apprehension David brushed his hands across his wet forehead and eyes to clear his sight. That the flume was gone, and their great effort robbed of further profit meant nothing to him at that moment. All his concern was centered on a single man, and then he saw in the storm spume on the bank a gigantic figure that loomed above the others, and muttered: "Thank God! Goliath's made it!"

Then he saw that the group of men on the bank were less conscious of the narrowness of their own escape than on something else toward which they pointed, gesticulating, moving restlessly, shouting words that David could not distinguish. He ran forward and joined them.

"What is it? What is it? Anybody gone, Goliath?" he cried as he gained his partner's side.

"Can't tell until we tally up—but—look out there!" Goliath pointed toward mid-river to a tiny island where the central buttress of the dam still stood bravely resisting the river's onslaught, and David saw lying thereon in a huddled heap, an inert man.

"Some of the boys saw one of the logs come swinging up on end, and it got that feller. He's a chink, but—maybe he ain't dead and—that chunk of dam can't last long!" David turned and suddenly ran toward the storehouse and Goliath, appeared to understand, bawled: "Good old Dave! Good old Dave!"

In a few minutes David reappeared, stripped to the waist and carrying a coil of rope that had been used in the lumber camp, and now his purpose dawned on the men who were clustered on the bank, and they broke into shouts of encouragement. Even as David ran he was knotting its end around his body beneath his armpits, and was directing his course upstream to a point that projected out into the flood. Goliath ran upward to intercept him, shouting to the men to follow. He was the first to reach David.

"David," he shouted, "untie that line! I'm going after that chink. I'll not let you

go! I can swim as well as you can! Get it off, I say!" And he began to struggle furiously to remove the rope from about the small man's body.

But David wriggled loose, dodged under his partner's arm, shouted, "Grab that line and feed it out, somebody!" and gained the river's rim. He had jerked off his heavy boots before Goliath could reach him and recklessly plunged into the torrent. It submerged him at intervals, powerful swimmer though he was; it resorted to sweeping undercurrents and then threw him upward into the crests of turgid waves and buffeted him into whirlpools; but sturdily he swam toward the solitary piece of dam, the little rapidly disintegrating island on whose top rested an inert figure in sodden blue denim.

Goliath stood in the edge of the water, a pillar of a man, heedless of the fact that it was sweeping up over his boot tops, and with his own hands, paid out the rope. He was unaware that he spoke, but afterward men said that constantly his lips moved in a kind of prayer. The crowd gasped when they saw the swimmer's arms reach up to clutch a projecting log against which, for a time, he clung as if spent. Then slowly and laboriously his shoulders emerged, and now he was up on top of the dam, lying on his side and struggling for breath. Piece by piece the remnant of the dam was going.

Then they saw that David was lashing the inert Chinese to his own back—back to back—preparatory for his final effort. The watchers saw him straighten up with his burden, pause to look toward them, and then wave his arm as if in token that he was prepared to plunge. He took two or three staggering steps and then fell headlong into the flood, and, as if loosened by his movement, the last of the great dam went with a single parting swing.

When David opened his eyes again he was filled with anguish, for above him stooped Goliath working his arms up and down, up and down, to induce respiration, while under Miss Sloan's direction two lumberjacks, with hard hands, were chafing his legs. Absurdly enough his first clear thought was one of abashment at his evident nudity. He struggled, tried to sit up, and sputtered.

But Goliath caught him in his arms and carried him in that shameless condition up the hillside to the cabin, and Goliath stumbled, because—somehow—he couldn't see very clearly, all things to his vision being filled with a great mist that dripped from his clouded eyes. Goliath murmured foolish things, intended to be comforting, like "Steady, Davy, steady! You're all right now! You ain't dead, Davy. I got you with me—yet!"

And then, wearied to the point where nothing was of consequence, David thought he was falling asleep in Goliath's arms, and that it was a dizzy, giddy, tired world where nothing at all mattered, save rest. The next he knew was that it was clear daylight, and that the sun now and then made a momentary blaze of light through the cabin window above his bunk as the curtain of cloud shifted and fought through the outer skies. For a long time he looked at some one sitting near his bed, and puzzled, and then with a great wave of returning intelligence and strength, identified the figure as Miss Sloan.

"Hello, Miss Marthy," he said, and then after a struggle sat up. "What's—what's all this stuff on my head?"

His calloused fingers felt over the bandages as if to appraise his hurt.

"Did—did I save the chink?" he asked.

"Yes. You saved him. He was up here an hour ago to ask about your condition."

"Humph! An hour ago? Why—why—what time is it now?"

"You've been this way for more than thirty hours."

He meditated over that, half whistled "Phwew!" paused, and said: "Thirty hours, eh? And—Goliath?"

"Goliath's all right. He is out retorting the last of the amalgam. And—Dave—an hour ago he told me that the work had won! That despite all that we lost through the wreck of the dam we should have more than thirty thousand dollars profit! And—I'm your partner, too, and Goliath is a partner to both, so we divide that up—don't we? Equally, I mean. But if I'm asking too much, which maybe I am, we'll——"

"Asking too much? And we gettin' full third shares? Don't be a fool!" David growled. "Have some sense. It's a heap more than Goliath or me'd of asked. That settles that. I'm sort of hankerin' to see Goliath. He's busy, so I got to go to him. If you don't mind, Miss Marthy, I'd like two things; one is that you get out of here for a while, and the other is that you can kindly tell me where I can find my clothes!"

The next story of this series, "Yin Tip San," in the succeeding number.

Pay Dirt, and Tailings

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Author of "The Ridin' Kid from Powder River," "Waring of Sonoratown," Etc.

The central figure of this story may be said to be the cuckoo clock. When old Jim Houston installed one of these contraptions in his cabin, he opened the way to tragic happenings. Sam Osborne just couldn't stand the thing, and he brought his six-shooter into play. But, as usual with a Knibbs story, it doesn't make so much difference to the reader just what it's about, so long as Knibbs writes it.

(A Two-Part Story—Part One)

THE desert sun was having its own way with Palmas to such an extent that even the two village burros had sought the shade of the railroad water tank, and when the burros did that, it was considered hot. The general store, the drug store, the station across the street, Mike's Place, the livery, and the blacksmith shop were all open to inspection that noon, but there seemed to be no one around to receive a possible inspector. Palmas was taking its midday siesta. A faint odor of superheated metal and paint pervaded the town. Mike's Place had recently been renovated, as to roof and interior. The new, red-painted roof could not squirm in the heat, but it looked and smelled as though it wanted to. The sidewalk and sundry board signs had more latitude, and they took it. This sidewalk, worn and gutted by punchers' high heels and prospectors' hobnails, needed but little encouragement to become a practical example of spontaneous combustion.

There were scant patches of shade, and corners that appeared cool, comparatively, but they were not. A hobo had preëmpted the only cool place in town, and that was directly beneath the drip of the water tank, in the shade. The two burros stood, one on either side of him—three actual philosophers. Had an overheated citizen seated himself with the hobo and the burros, that August noon, he would have lost caste. But then, we of the city often shed our coats in a fairly cool office and put them on when we go out to the hot street. And democracy to the contrary, caste is a mighty big thing in a small town.

Far to the west the range of the Panamints seemed to be having the best of it, being far enough from Palmas to at least appear cool. Old Jim Houston, desert wise, gazed at the distant hills and speculated as to whether or not there was a breeze up there. So he kept himself from dwelling too intently on the immediate heat. Old Jim's burro didn't speculate on anything. He simply closed his eyes and plodded along ahead of Jim. And without being uncomplimentary to either, it may be stated that they were much alike, both being desert bred, deliberate, and heavy set. Not all desert men and animals are lean. Jim was slow and thorough, stubborn to perverseness, cautiously jovial at times, and an easy man to get along with, if you let him travel about a mile ahead of you when you were getting along anywhere—as his friend, Sam Osborne, used to say. Aside from general contour, the chief difference between old Jim and his burro was that the burro made fewer mistakes in a year than old Jim did. And one of old Jim Houston's gravest mistakes was in believng that he never made any.

Despite the heat, old Jim seemed elated, in a mild way. The day before, he had received word from his friend, Sam Osborne, that there was a package in the post office awaiting his arrival. Jim alone knew what was in that package, and he wanted it. No, it was not bottled goods. Old Jim had little use for bottled goods of any kind. The

package contained simply one of those hand-carved abortions known as a cuckoo clock.

On his claim back in the Sawtooth, old Jim had labored many a day to pan enough dust to purchase that clock. Until a month previous he had not known that there were such diverting contraptions as cuckoo clocks. Sojourning briefly in Mrs. Larabee's boarding house in Two Strike, a neighboring town, old Jim had all but choked to death on a partially chewed mouthful of beefsteak when the erstwhile invisible and silent cuckoo inhabiting Mrs. Larabee's clock popped out suddenly and "cuck-ooed" twelve times without drawing breath. After old Jim had recovered his poise, he deliberately set himself to prolong his stay at the table until one o'clock, that he might hear the blame' thing chirp ag'in. He ate cautiously, and chewed each piece of steak with a kind of bovine thoughtfulness and a lateral movement of his under jaw, due primarily to the fact that there were places along that jaw where teeth were not. But again the little bird caught him off his guard, at the quarter hour.

Thereafter old Jim ate with one eye on the clock, so to speak, and one on Mrs. Larabee. He wanted to see where the dinged bird holed up, and also if Mrs. Larabee thought that he thought the steak was tough. He had choked on it twice. But at twelve-thirty he would be prepared. Already he had prolonged his stay at table beyond the usual limit. The other guests had risen and departed their several ways, with their several toothpicks. Old Jim gained courage from their absence. When the cuckoo told the world that it was half past twelve—and the bird did it with all the self-assertiveness of those who tell the world things—old Jim smiled.

With that abruptness common to those who are unaccustomed to feminine society and wish to say something, old Jim asked Mrs. Larabee if she would sell the clock. Mrs. Larabee gazed at old Jim reprovingly. She thought that he had been drinking. Old Jim flushed from his fetlocks to his foretop as he explained that he had never before seen a clock with a bird in its innards; that he didn't get to see much, bein' so pow'ful busy workin' his placer over to the Sawtooth. Mrs. Larabee's intuition, which was never allowed to rust, told her that the admirer of her imported timepiece was sincere and sober. And when old Jim confessed that he had only about half his teeth, but could have eaten her cooking if he had not had any, Mrs. Larabee told him where he could get a clock like hers, and just what it had cost, twelve years ago.

"Thet bird been on the job twelve years?" queried old Jim.

"Twelve years next month," Mrs. Larabee assured him.

"An' never broke down an' quit?"

"Ain't missed once, except when Larabee died. That was six years ago last March. I was that excited account of the funeral I forgot to hang the weights on, the day before. But when I got back from burying him, I hung the weights on, the first thing. It was a comfort to hear the cuckoo again, just as cheerful as if nothing had happened."

Old Jim sidled from his chair and rose to leave. If he feared anything, it was a widow woman. Besides, he was reputed to be pretty well fixed. Despite his longing to know more about the clock, he departed hastily, not forgetting to jot down the name and address of the firm who imported cuckoo clocks, after he was safely removed from the peril of Mrs. Larabee's obvious intent to be friendly.

A clock like that would be good company during the long winter evenings, when the rain roared on the shingles of his cabin and the outer world was a blank of misty gray. And then, he would not have to strike a match and look at his watch, just before daybreak, because the little bird would cuckoo the hour, the quarter, the half, and the three-quarter—and so, he told himself to ease his conscience about the price—he could save matches. Such a clock would cost him thirty-two dollars, plus express charges, or just thirty-one dollars more than his present timepiece, manufactured at Waterbury and of distant kin to the more recent and popular modification attributed to the genius of Mr. Ingersoll.

Then, old Jim would have one on Sam Osborne! Sam was Jim's nearest neighbor, their placers being a matter of some two miles apart. Sam was always bragging about his hen, Blackie—a solitary female with no apparent inclinations toward matrimony; or about his big Australian tomcat, Blue. Sam liked animals. So did Jim. But their methods of showing it were different. True, old Jim had the brother to the tomcat, whom he called Squib, a huge, white-stockinged tom; and also Susan, a thoroughbred pig of tender years.

Old Jim was mighty proud of Susan. Her pedigree was beyond reproach, even if her markings were a bit peculiar. Susan belonged to that breed of pigs which displays a white band just behind the shoulders, the rest of the body being black. In Susan's case, however, the white band was just in front of her plump hams, giving her a decidedly décolleté appearance, as though her mother had been a trifle careless and had dressed her in haste, without sufficient attention having been paid to the buttoning of her nether garment. At least, that is what Sam Osborne intimated, along with the assertion that, personally, he believed Susan to be morally O. K. This rather irked old Jim, for Susan was the bright particular companion of his lonely existence. Susan was allowed the freedom of the dooryard, and occasionally, the run of the house. She followed old Jim about like a dog, only more so. Jim shut her in her pen at night because of her tender years—and the coyotes. Susan was a young pig—a very young pig—wider, but not so tall as the big Australian tomcat, Squib.

Susan's voice was a high soprano when she was empty, and an immature contralto when she was filled. Susan had been taken from her mother as the runt of the litter, and raised on condensed milk in a regular nursing bottle. Old Jim did the raising. Naturally little Susan doted on old Jim—and her bottle. Later, he mixed feed for her. He scratched her back. He held her on his knee and taught Squib, who thought he had a lien on that knee, to be polite to small pigs. And the more old Jim did for the tiny Susan, the more he liked her. While taciturn in human company, old Jim was talkative when with his animals. He was not overfond of humans, Sam Osborne being the one exception. Old Jim believed in justice, and asked only to be let alone to pan his living from the placer, pay his store bills, and follow his own advice. Sam, while about Jim's age, was different. He was invariably genial, hearty, talkative, quick of movement, energetic, and an optimist.

Jim, if anything, was a bit pessimistic. Sam drove a lively pinto team, hitched to a light buckboard. Old Jim said he would not be bothered with horses. His burro served his needs. Sam had installed some modern machinery on his claim. Old Jim still stuck to old-fashioned methods. Each was certain he was going to strike it rich some day, yet each knew he would hardly do that. They managed to make enough, individually, to keep themselves in food and clothing, with a little put by for a rainy day. One thing rather irritated old Jim, although he never mentioned it. Sam was invariably known as "Sam." Jim himself was known as "Old Jim." The reason for which was not difference in years, but in temperament.

As old Jim plodded across the noon desert, gazing at the distant Panamints, he hummed a tune. His burro nodded drowsily, but kept an even pace. Palmas was not so far away now.

Through habit, old Jim stopped at Mike's Place. He never drank, but every one stopped at Mike's Place. Every one liked Dan Patterson, the new proprietor. No one seemed to know why Dan Patterson had come to Palmas, nor why he had bought the old saloon and remodeled it. Yet every one knew that old Jim—who detested liquor—and Dan Patterson, who sold it, were warm friends.

After a word or two with Patterson, old Jim trudged out. As a bridegroom goeth forth to the slaughter, so old Jim approached the town post office, which was carefully concealed in the dark interior of the general store. Almost timidly he inquired if there was a letter for him. And timidly he took the letter, which was glaringly embellished with the trade-mark of a far-distant mail-order house, the house from which he had ordered the cuckoo clock. The postmaster's face wore an expression of surprise. Old Jim was evidently patronizing other than local industries. Others in town did it, but old Jim was considered a bed-rock citizen. Old Jim offered no explanation, nor did he open the letter, but thrust it into the hip pocket of his jeans.

Any one who knows the intimacy of soul that prevails in a desert town knows that this act was a breach of etiquette, to say the least. But the heat intervened to save Jim's social standing in Palmas. The postmaster reverted to his armchair near the rear window, and continued his siesta. It was too hot to express an opinion, even with the eyebrows. Old Jim tiptoed out of the store as though he bore guilt sealed in that long envelope. He creaked down the board walk, turned and crossed the street, and hailed the station agent from a fly-tortured dream into the present reality of heat that discounted by degrees the promise of a tropical here-

after. Try a desert railroad station at twelve-thirty any day in August.

Old Jim wanted to know "If a passel had come" for him.

Through habit the agent said, "No," and then began to search for the "passel." Old Jim waited patiently, meanwhile viewing with his shrewd, desert-trained eyes the very parcel itself, trade-marked as was the letter, which the agent had set aside to dig through a miscellany of packages, fly-specked and dusty. Old Jim expected to find a rather imposing package. The one he saw was compact and not half the size of a cuckoo clock in all its glory. Outlanders are slow to suggest ways and means to individuals who are paid to know the ways and means of their special callings. But finally old Jim spoke: "That there passel with the red and green printin' on it—mebby that's it."

The agent took his hand from the package indicated, on which he had leaned to paw over the rest of the packages. "James Houston, Palmas, California," he read, as though James Houston was in Alaska, and Palmas a town he had never heard of. Then he turned and spit over the top of his swing chair into the cuspidor—a neat shot considering the need for well-judged trajectory—and turning back to old Jim, informed him that the parcel had arrived.

"I'll pay the charges and pack it along with me," said old Jim. "I was figurin' to git home afore dark."

This sarcasm slid off the rounded shoulders of the agent like a Western sunbeam off a cliff. Old Jim, like the sun, was almost gone before it reached the top.

Jim packed the clock carefully on the burro, and immediately struck out across the desert toward home. "And if you stumble and bust it, I'll shoot you!" asserted old Jim as the burro plodded and nodded toward the Sawtooth range; which was evidence that old Jim was internally excited about something. Men like old Jim, when they make up their minds to kill any one or anything, do the killing first and the talking afterward.

The bronze of the Sawtooth range deepened and spread. Long shadows crept across the arroyos as old Jim approached his claim in Boyd's Gulch. Jim hoped that Sam Osborne had not come down that afternoon to stay for supper and play their usual game or two of pinochle. Jim wanted to be alone with his melodious secret that evening. Sam was not there. Old Jim unpacked the burro, turned him loose, fed the pig Susan, and then cooked his own supper, while Squib stalked round, as hungry cats will, rubbing against the table legs, the chair legs, and old Jim's legs impartially. Squib was a big cat and had a hearty appetite.

Perhaps you are not of that generation which is able to recall its first pair of copper-toed boots with red leather tops; but, no doubt, you can recall the proud moment when you donned your first pair of long trousers. Well, old Jim felt somewhat like that; eager, a trifle timid, a bit overbold, and exceedingly curious, as he unwrapped and opened the box that contained the cuckoo clock. Then he knew why the box was not as big as he had expected it to be. The pendulum was detached. With clumsy, gravel-calloused fingers he removed the last wisp of excelsior and lifted the carved, wooden clock from its nest. He blew the flecks of excelsior from the white-numbered dial, shook the clock gently, pulled open the little double door cautiously. There was the cuckoo all right—a stiff, carved bird, truly no skylark, but a diminutive potential of premeditated art, in so far as vocal offenses were concerned. Old Jim searched for the key. He wanted to wind up the contraption. There was no key. But beneath a final layer of excelsior reposed the iron weights—fashioned to look like pine cones—which, he recalled, had to be attached to the shorter chains to make the clock run.

Old Jim selected a spot on the wall, drove a nail, and hung the clock up. He attached the weights to the alternate short chains. She sure would "coo" in about a minute. Jim settled himself in his home-made, board chair and began to fill his pipe. Suddenly the hands of the clock began to move noticeably. Their pace grew faster. Then out popped the bird and chirped the hour of eight. Round sped the hands, and the bird popped out again and chirped the quarter. Something was wrong. Old Jim scratched his head. Out popped the cuckoo again and chirped the half, then the three-quarter, and finally nine. Squib, the tomcat, arched his back and puffed his tail. The cuckoo was doing a delirious dance, in and out, and in and out again, and cuckooing so rapidly that his song was one long, uninterrupted advertisement that "Life is short and Time is fleeting." Old Jim had forgotten to attach the pendulum.

Squib stood it as long as he could. Then he gathered himself and made his leap. Squib missed the bird by a feather, but clung to the clock and clawed for a foothold. Old Jim jumped up, cursing extensively. Squib let go, turned over in the air, lit on his feet, and spitting maledictions, broke for the kindly cover of the night. The cuckoo uttered a final, spiritless "coo," and subsided.

Old Jim gazed mournfully at the apparent wreck of his hopes. Both weights were on the floor. The clock had run down. Then old Jim bethought himself of the pendulum and attached it. Reversing the weights to the shorter chains, and pulling the longer chains up, he stepped back. The cuckoo clock purred and ticked along steadily. And once more the cuckoo appeared from behind his door, and chirped eight chirps without a hitch. Old Jim smiled. According to his watch it was just eight o'clock. He charged the twelve hours that the clock had made in about four minutes, up to profit and loss, and settled back to enjoy himself. He gazed admiringly at the clock, and forgot to light his pipe.

Fifteen minutes past eight the cuckoo popped out and did his part. Jim was delighted. "Sam'll sure want to git one. But I got mine first. Like as not Sam'll let on he ain't interested; same as he done when I showed him them nuggets I panned up the gulch. He said they wan't no coarse gold in this part of the country, even after he seen what I found. Then next week he comes along and asts me where I located it. Huh! Now, mebby I'll tell him where I got that clock, and mebby not. Wonder where Squib hit for? I reckon that cat's hidin' out under the junipers, scared flat. I got to learn him to keep his hands off that leetle bird."

Old Jim settled back in his chair and read the paper. He read slowly, commenting aloud, as was his custom. Meanwhile Squib entered unnoticed, his tail still oversize and his skid chains on, judging by his walk. Squib was a born hunter of small game. Moreover, he was accustomed to spending his evenings in the cabin, either on old Jim's knee or in the corner back of the stove. Squib considered the cabin *his* cabin, and he resented the presence of even Susan, to say nothing of an insolent bird.

Squib stole toward the clock and gazed up at it with round, combative eyes. His tail switched and he crouched for another deadly spring; but old Jim caught him in the act, cuffed him; and for some old-fashioned reason or another, rubbed Squib's nose against the clock, as he told him in no polished diction that the leetle bird in there was taboo—not to be molested, but rather, to be admired. Old Jim told Squib that he would exterminate him in quick smoke if he jumped for that bird again. Allowed to go, Squib arched his back, flirted his tail and strutted round the cabin, animosity in his mein, and more profanity in his attitude than old Jim had ever uttered at his best. But from that night on, Squib never attempted to assassinate the cuckoo. Squib hated the insolent, double-barreled utterances of the bird, but he grew accustomed to them, finally, even as he grew accustomed to the roar of the rain on the cabin roof, in winter, although both the cuckoo and the rain made him internally uncomfortable.

A few nights after the cuckoo clock had been installed, Sam Osborne breezed in from his placer, eager for an evening of pinochle. Sam, whose eyes were trained by outland exigencies to see everything, especially the new or unexpected, spotted the gorgeously carved clock at once, gazed at it sideways, whistled a bar or two of "Annie Laurie," and said nothing. Sam knew that this would eventually provoke his friend to utter some diverting remark. Sam enjoyed pestering old Jim for the sake of the acrid conversation which usually ensued, a conversation carried on throughout the evening game of cards, with much ready-made wit and considerable affected animus. To remain silent under the present circumstances was the quickest way to provoke old Jim to some eloquent and amusing utterance, some bit of dry, sage-brush philosophy. Pride in the cuckoo clock was evident in old Jim's attitude of obvious indifference as he politely asked Sam if he had the correct time. Sam allowed that he had—and stretched the truth about thirty minutes as he glanced at his own watch and then gazed critically at the clock. "She's way off. I got thirty minutes after seven."

Old Jim pulled out *his* watch. "Then you better set your watch right with my clock. Accordin' to me, it's jest one minute to seven."

"Then what you askin' me the time for?"

Old Jim made no reply. Let Sam pretend that he was not itching all over to know all about the clock. And just wait until she started to chirp!

Presently the clock whirred, the doors

popped open, and out bobbed the cuckoo and "cuck-ooed" seven times. Sam stared, opened his mouth, then closed it, and chewed ruminatively. Old Jim was smiling.

Sam was a bit piqued that old Jim had not told him he intended buying a cuckoo clock. "Where'd you get the Chinese chicken coop, anyhow?"

"You'd sure like to know, now, wouldn't you? Chicken coop, eh? But shucks! I might 'a' knowed *you'd* never seen one. That there's a cuckoo clock, made over in Europe, up in them mountains they call the Elps. Hand-made, and guaranteed to last a life-time. She tells her story every hour, and fifteen after, and half past, and a quarter to, day and night. She ain't missed onct. Why, you kin lay in yore bed and listen, and know jest what time it is without strikin' a match. All you got to do is to change these here weights when they git to the floor, and she keeps right on runnin'. They come high —but she's a bird!"

"Well, they got funny ideas about birds up in them there Yelps Mountains. Sounds to me more like somebody stepped on a hen with both feet, one at a time. Did you honest pay real money for that blame' thing, or did you git it in a raffle?"

"Thirty-two dollars, and express charges," stated old Jim proudly.

Sam slumped into Jim's favorite chair and gazed up at the cuckoo clock. "So I be," he drawled. "Mighty curious to know how you keep 'em in without puttin' cotton in yore ears."

"Huh!" snorted old Jim. "You don't need any cotton in yore ears, for there's nothin' in yore head to git soft. What you got ag'inst my cuckoo clock, anythow?"

"Nothin'."

"Ever see one before?"

"Not when I was sober enough to remember it."

"Then what you snuffin' and snortin' about, anyhow?"

"Nothin'." And Sam yawned generously. "Only, the blame thing *looks* foolish and *sounds* foolish. Makes me think of a ole man playin' with one of them there baby rattles, jest to hear the noise it makes."

Old Jim frowned until his heavy eyebrows almost obscured his eyes. Sam seemed to be getting a trifle personal in his remarks.

"Jest *what* makes you think of a *ole* man and a baby rattle?" queried old Jim truculently.

"Why you—and that there wooden-headed bird. I ain't sayin' the clock is a bad looker. She's fancy enough. But if you could see how foolish you look when that there doo-dink sticks its beak out and does that there loo-loo-loo song, like it was plumb foolish itself, why you wouldn't go near a lookin' glass the rest of yore life. Can't you see the time, without havin' to have it whistled at you?"

"I kin see all right! And I kin hear all right, yit. And I ain't so soft in my head I kain't understand a insult."

"Insult, nothin'! You ast me what I thought of yore cuckoo-bird clock, and I told you. I never told you to buy the blame clock, did I?"

Old Jim's beard quivered with suppressed rage. What in the name of locoed bobcats did Sam mean by saying that he had not told him to buy the clock? Sam Osborne had never been so plumb, double-danged, mean and unreasonable since old Jim had known him. "You never told me to buy the blame clock, eh? Well, supposin' you had?"

"Why, then I'd be willin' to stand for it," replied Sam, smiling.

"So you don't like her, eh?"

Sam shook his head. "I hate to be worryin'. It don't come natural to me."

"I don't see how you got to worry. She ain't yore clock."

"'Tain't the clock—it's you," asserted Sam.

Old Jim decided that the cuckoo clock was not a social success. He had hoped that Sam would be surprised, pleased, envious, and filled with timely and humorous speech anent the cuckoo clock. But Sam seemed to be positively bitter. Old Jim slowly pulled up a chair, and slowly he shuffled the deck of cards for their evening game. For twelve years they had played pinochle together, with the game as a sort of background for their conversation. Just then the cuckoo popped out and with wooden insolence cuck-ooed the quarter.

"Jest so!" said Sam.

Old Jim passed the cards to his friend, who shuffled. They cut for deal and the game was on. But it was not the usual friendly game, with much comment, original wit, and impromptu sarcasm. Inevitably the cuckoo popped out and interrupted each attempt of either player to keep the ball of conversation rolling smoothly. The game resolved itself into an almost physical con-

test of straight pinochle. And in the mute handling of cards, in shuffle, deal, and play, none can express more strongly what is in his mind than your old-timer whose hands are heavy and whose knuckles are hard. Finally Sam quit. "The darn doo-dink is gettin' on my nerves," he asserted, jerking his head toward the innocent cuckoo clock.

Old Jim's raised eyebrows asked for an explanation.

"Every time I git to studyin' my hand, the blame' thing whoops," declared Sam.

"Whoops!" snorted old Jim. "Now I figure she's a right cheerful little ole clock. But some folks ain't got no idee of music."

"No—some ain't," asserted Sam darkly.

CHAPTER II.

Old Jim Houston and Sam Osborne had labored on their all-but-adjoining placers for over twelve years. They had grown so accustomed each to the other that they were all but partners. In fact, they were partners in companionship, argument, hospitality, and deliberate recrimination, which they both enjoyed. Neither allowed the other to do him a favor without reciprocating, sooner or later. If Sam went to the city, old Jim always trudged over and fed and watered the goat Kicker, the hen Blackie, and the two pintos. And on such occasions Blue, Sam's big tomcat, invariably followed old Jim back to his home and stayed about the place until his master returned. When the winter rains were heavy and old Jim was tied up with rheumatism, Sam always found excuse to stop by, fetch the mail, and see that old Jim's supplies were adequate. Yet neither had ever actually asked a favor of the other, a hint being sufficient. They expressed their interest in each other by deeds rather than words. When it came to words: well, a casual observer, breaking in upon one of their not unusual sessions of rabid argument would have left, feeling that it was no place for the innocent bystander of immortal fame.

Once, after a heated discussion relative to the finding, or the possibility of finding water a fed rods south of the "fault" running through Sam's claim, they had parted, each vowing that the other was unfit for human society. Nevertheless, toward the end of the week, old Jim sauntered over to Sam's claim. Sam was not at the cabin. Hearing the faint tinkle of steel on rock, old Jim meandered up the gulch, where he found Sam trying to lower a heavy cement pipe into a well he had dug and walled up with stone. Sam was having trouble with the block and tackle, and the shears were placed where they would slip when the pipe was swung free. Old Jim watched Sam for a minute or so. Then he spat on his hands, and picked up a crowbar. Sam ceased operations. "Want to borrow that bar?" he queried irritably.

Old Jim paid no attention to the question. "Take a turn of yore line round that stump, straighten up them shears, and, when I pry her off, let her pay out easy."

"Who's diggin' this here well?"

"Nobody. She's dug," asserted old Jim.

Sam grinned and took a turn round the stump, with the line. Old Jim sure could be real human when he wanted to.

Then old Jim adjusted the shears, pried the cement pipe free and steadied it, as Sam lowered away.

Jim spent the rest of the afternoon helping Sam, and that their friendly relations were firmly rehabilitated was evident when old Jim accidentally dropped a bit of broken stone on Sam, who was down in the well wedging the pipe, and Sam did not even mention the fact. Naturally old Jim had yelled, "Stand from under!" as the fragment of stone slipped. But Sam, owing to the dimensions of the well, had to stand right where he was.

"Hit you?" queried old Jim from above.

"Oh, she jest glanced off my dome," replied Sam cheerfully, as he felt of the goose-egg slowly rising to prominence on the top of his head.

"I'm sure glad!" declared old Jim fervently, and Sam did not take him up, as he might have done. He knew what Jim meant.

After supper that evening Sam came over to Jim's cabin for their game of cards. The subject of finding water was not mentioned. Old Jim knew that Sam *had* found water south of the fault, and that the new well was slowly filling. And Sam did not boast of having found water. Old Jim's presence at Sam's placer when Sam was really in need of help, was a silent apology for anything said in the heat of argument. And Sam's subsequent silence anent the finding of water was a thoroughly understood apology for anything he might have said in the heat of argument. So they adjusted their differences as they progressed from year to year—and so

accustomed were they to pooling their interests when a two-man job presented itself, that they hardly realized how much they depended upon each other.

Yet they could not have pooled their interests to the extent of living together. Old Jim liked to live alone. He was a bit "fussy" about things. His hot bread had to be "jest so." His methods of placering were "jest so." The regularity of his habits would have filled a Western Union clock with envy. He fed his burro, the pig, the cat, and the mountain quail that came down to his yard each morning, with a precision that was machine-like. Occasionally one of the quail also fed the cat, but not intentionally. Then, old Jim was a bit shy of modern methods. Slowly and toilfully he scraped the black sand from behind the rocks and ridges in the dry stream bed of the arroyos and washes of his claim, often using a broom to sweep the interstices clean. He was painfully methodical, and he enjoyed it. He earned fair day wages.

Sam had installed some modern machinery copied from a larger pattern which he had seen at the San Francisco Exposition. He used a revolving screen to handle the coarse dirt, ran the pulverized dirt through a "worm" and into a long box somewhat like a sluice box, which had a side-shake motion, operated by a small gas engine. He ran the dirt from there into an amalgamator of his own invention. He also made fair day wages. While they could never have agreed as working partners, socially they got along well. Sam's unvarying optimism gave old Jim a chance to be as pessimistic as he liked, and old Jim liked to be pessimistic. Old Jim's attitude toward the world was one of extreme caution. Old Jim was stone blind compared to the average Missourian. His theory was that it never could be, until it had happened. Sam, to the contrary, believed it had to be until thrice proven that it was impossible.

And Sam's optimism was not altogether without foundation. He was hearty, strong, and had an excellent digestive apparatus. He whistled a great deal; and he worked with the vigor of an unbitted colt at play. He had energy to spare. Old Jim conserved his energies. In early life the desert had taken a pretty heavy toll of him. Sam really respected old Jim's cautious and methodical ways. Old Jim secretly admired Sam's abundant physical energy and good spirits.

"But when you have cooked and et as much hot bread and beans as I have, you won't feel so a'mighty coltish," old Jim was wont to assert.

"What a boiler you must 'a' had to stand that kind of feed all these years," was Sam's usual comment.

At first, old Jim took this as a compliment to his "boiler," but he finally got Sam's basic meaning. "If I kain't eat what I cook, my cat kin," he observed.

Sam had gazed at Squib? "Yes, he looks overfed."

So they had sparred from day to day and from month to month, until the arrival of the cuckoo clock. And the arrival of the cuckoo clock marked the hour of their first serious difference.

Their former friendship had been rehabilitated by the incident of the well. That night they played their few games of pinochle, both ignoring the cuckoo's insolent reiterations of the passing hour. And it was all quiet along the Sawtooth, until Sam, who had just lost a game to Jim, opened his mouth to explain how he might have won. Then, unexpectedly, the cuckoo popped out and "cuck-ooed" twice. It sounded like premeditated impertinence and old Jim simply had to smile. That settled it. Sam pushed back from the table and stood up. "I see you got that baby rattle yet," he said, and strode out and down the trail.

A week had slipped by since Sam had expressed his disapproval of the cuckoo clock, and there had been no game of cards, no friendly salute as Sam drove past, to town, nor had old Jim sauntered over to see how Sam was making it. Old Jim had not forgiven Sam's second thrust about the "baby rattle." Old Jim knew that he himself was not the man physically that he had been ten years ago, but he did not like to be told so.

As for Sam, he scarcely gave the subject a thought, until he realized that it had been a week since he had seen old Jim. Sam had been busy hauling lumber from an abandoned flume up in the hills. He had not had time for social enjoyment. He wondered if his friend were really offended, and he wished fervently that the dinged cuckoo clock had stayed in the Yelps, where it belonged. That Saturday, as Sam drove to town, he noticed that old Jim, chopping wood in the dooryard, did not glance up, nor wave

a friendly salute. Yet he knew that old Jim had seen him. "Mebby I *did* tuck into him a leetle strong," Sam admitted to himself as he drove on down the road. "Old Jim is mighty touchy about his age. But shucks! I'm as old as he is. He ought to know me! Now I sure have called him some pow'ful hard names when we was arguin', at times, and he never sweat a hair. And the names he's called me since I've knowed him would mean a killin', except between friends. Guess I got to fetch down his mail this evenin' and see how he is partin' his hair, or if he is wearin' it straight up and rarin'."

Sam drove to town and tied up at Mike's Place. He always tied up there, and he usually patronized the bar to the extent of a drink when leaving. To-day, however, Sam took his drink, and another, before he started out to make his few purchases and get the mail. He took the second drink because he intended to drive straight from town to old Jim's claim, and he wanted to be feeling just right when he arrived. They would have a good session at cards and a pleasant evening together.

While Sam was taking his time with his second drink he gazed round the saloon. It had been changed a lot since the original Mike had sold it to Dan Patterson. It offered entertainment somewhat alien to the average desert-town saloon. The interior had been remodeled. There were plain, heavy chairs, in place of the rickety chairs that had been, and plain, heavy side tables. Down the middle of the room ran a long, solid table littered with current magazines and newspapers. The old 'dobe walls had been plastered and tinted with a homelike shade of brown. Two big hanging lamps illumined the long table at night. The old bar had been torn out. The new bar was on the north side of the room. There was no fly-specked bar mirror, but instead, a long shelf, and above it some believable pictures of horses and dogs. The floor had been relaid and was kept clean.

Dan Patterson had dispensed with the usual foot rail. Old-timers missed it. Frequently they pawed the air searching vainly for the feel of the rail against their boot heels. Patterson did not go into the psychology of it, but accepted it as a fact that men drank less when there was no rail to rest one foot on. Patterson noticed that the boys often saunfered curiously to the long table, picked up the magazines or papers and as often as not, sat down and read or looked at pictures for a half hour or so.

At first the citizens of Palmas and its environs could not understand Dan Patterson. He dispensed liquor cheerfully but never tried to sell it. In fact, he would not sell a drink to a man whom he thought had had enough. Finally his place became noted as a "square deal," which was good advertising. He served cowmen and prospectors who behaved themselves. The other element soon tired of trying to bluff him. He never had recourse to the gun that lay on the shelf back of the bar. But it was there, in plain sight—and so was Patterson. His quiet manner, his silence about himself, and his geniality won him friends and respect. The old, red, raring, tearing days were about over, and wise citizens realized it.

Sam left Mike's Place none the worse for his two modest drinks. He made his purchases, got the mail for himself and old Jim, and had returned to the saloon to take a final chest warmer, when Chet, a cowboy from the hills, hailed him. "Got a hoss I'll sell you," he called from across the street.

"What you askin' for him?" queried Sam jokingly.

"Come and look him over. Come on! I ain't joshin' you."

Sam strode across the street. Chet piloted him to the dim recess of the town livery, where a handsome bay cow pony was tied in a stall.

"What you givin' us!" said Sam, who knew that Chet might, in dire stress of circumstance, part with his clothing, even to his last shred, but that he would never sell his favorite horse.

Chet waved a hand that commanded silence. He tiptoed to the manger, fumbled about and brought forth a quart bottle, sealed and intact. He jackknifed the cork out and passed the bottle to Sam. "You take the first shot at her. It ain't lucky for a fella to start a fresh bottle himself."

Sam paused as he digested this statement. "Oh, it ain't, eh?"

"I was meanin' if he owned the bottle."

"Oh! So you been waitin' for some one to lift the curse from this here quart of Shintangle. I sure hate to see you suffer, so here goes. U-m-m! That jest hit the soles of my feet. Say, there's a weddin' and a couple of funerals and a dance in that there bottle. Where'd you git it? Patterson don't sell no bottled goods."

"Come by express, this mornin'. Doc Howard sent her to me. Ever since I took him huntin' in the Sawtooth, he sends me a quart every year, whether I need it or not."

Chet lowered the mark set by Sam and passed the bottle back to him.

Sam felt comfortable, very comfortable. He read the label and commented upon it as not having been misplaced. He held the bottle up to the light, lowered it, and gazed at it.

"You ain't scared of breakin' yore arm, be you?" queried Chet.

"Nope. My wing is workin'."

"Then fly to it, pardner. Life is short—and I'm a treatin'."

"That one never got to my feet," declared Sam, as he wiped his lips and returned the bottle to Chet. "She hit the turntable and steamed right into the round house. Felt her jolt when she stopped."

"Do you reckon she'd pitch if you give her her head?" queried Chet.

"Reckon she would. But, say, pardner, I got to git back to my family."

"Since when you took to callin' a hen and a goat yore family, old-timer?"

"Ever since I had 'em. That leetle goat, Kicker——"

"Ain't in it with this here kicker. That there goat don't care what time you git home. Can't you think of nothin' but goin' home, right now? Me, I'm never goin' home. Ain't got no home, anyhow. I'm a pore lonely cowboy." And Chet took still another generous drink that he might forget his sad estate.

Somehow or other, Sam found the bottle in his hand again. He did not intend to take another drink. He knew that he had had just a little more than enough. But, proving the old saying that "Two drinks make a man careless enough to take two more," Sam tilted the bottle. "Feel like I swallowed a bucket of sunshine. But how-come you picked on me to help you bust this here bronc?"

"'Cause you don't talk much, Sammy. You jest take yours and git into yore little ole buckboard and curl yore tail for home. I'd sure been stomped to death in the rush if the boys knowed I had this here High Life cached in here."

"Yo're cachin' it where nobody is like to git it," observed Sam, as Chet took another installment.

"I reckon we better finish her," said Chet. "She might git spilled."

"That's right!" declared Sam gravely.

"Then you hold her a while," invited Chet. "I done lost that cork."

"This here is jest as good," asserted Sam. He saw the rafters of the livery before he returned the bottle to Chet, who concluded the ceremony of "selling Sam a horse" by emptying the bottle and tossing it out into the corral. Sam strode out and solemnly picked up the bottle and threw it out of the corral. "Bad for hosses," he commented.

Chet thought that Sam's remark was exceedingly humorous. He laughed as he nudged Sam. "We got a good start, Sammy—a rattlin' good start, and I never start anything I kain't finish. Let's lope over to Dan's and finish her."

"Dan won't give us nothin' after he sees what we'll be feelin' like pretty poco dam' quick. I'm shore all right, but I kin feel her gittin' ready to kick. Reckon I better climb into my hearse and head the percession for home."

"You shore qualified, old-timer, but yo're like to lose yore stirrup in the finals. Let 'er buck!"

"Let 'er buck," echoed Sam, a trifle lugubriously. The bucket of sunshine that he had so recently mentioned was fast becoming obscured by a leaden fog.

Dan Patterson, caught unaware, served the ambitious twain a drink each before he realized that they had been tapping private stock. Then he shut down on them tight. Sam was inclined to persuasion. Chet leaned toward high-pitched argument.

"An' I'm as sober as a judge," declared Sam, finding that his persuasiveness was of no avail.

"An' I want a drink. I'm drier'n a dam' lizard," declared Chet.

Patterson pushed back the dollar that Chet flung on the bar. Patterson would not argue. Chet pocketed the dollar, and as he did so, his expression changed from geniality to one of offended dignity. "Anything wrong with my money?" he queried.

Chet lifted his foot and reached for the foot rail that was not there. He had been leaning one elbow on the edge of the bar. As his foot missed the resistance of a rail, his elbow slipped. His nose struck the edge of the bar, and struck it hard. Chet backed away and watched the slow drip of red with drunken intensity.

Suddenly he straightened. "I kin shoot the buttons off the man that done that!" He did not say what. But before he could reach for his gun, Sam, who stood beside him, jerked the gun from its holster and slipped it out of sight in his own waistband. Chet fumbled for his gun, felt the empty holster, and muttering something about "getting" somebody, he turned and marched solemnly out, and down the street. He thought, in a confused way, that he had dropped the gun in the livery stable.

"Going home?" queried Patterson cheerfully, as Sam hesitated.

"Goin' home," said Sam as he walked heavily toward the doorway. Patterson followed him out and saw him safely aboard his craft. Sam pulled up the reins as the pintos showed a disposition to leave suddenly, and he thanked Patterson profusely for some reason or another known only to his own fuddled brain. The pintos, who knew that their stay in Palmas had been longer than usual, lost no time in making up what they thought they had lost. The buckboard passed the corner drug store with her lee rail all but awash, lifted and straightened out as she came into the wind, and Sam, who had weathered similar perils in days past, leaned to the rise and fall of the buckboard as she rode the billows of the blurred and heaving mesa. "Got to stop by and see ole Jim," he reiterated aloud. "Got to tell 'im didn't mean nothin' 'bout baby rattle. Git along, you Siwash!"

Siwash and his harness mate got along. There was no doubt about it. But high speed did not bother Sam, just then. He felt that he couldn't get to old Jim's cabin any too soon. So he hung and rattled, until the pintos, pretty well winded, drew up at Jim's gate.

When Sam arrived at old Jim's cabin that evening, about seven o'clock, the liquor had begun to lose its first sprightly effect. Sam felt alternately enthused and melancholy. His mental numbness overrode old Jim's frigid greeting. With undue formality Sam fetched out old Jim's newspaper and gave it to him. Old Jim thanked Sam with equal formality, but Sam caught no sarcasm in this. Nor had old Jim invited Sam to stop by for supper. But that made no difference to Sam. He felt quite at home. Old Jim was a vague figure that blurred and grew distinct—but he was Jim. Sam was positive of that. And there was the cat, Squib.

He knew it was Squib because it had four white stockings—when it walked. When it was lying down, as it was at present, its feet did not show. Squib got up and stretched. Sam grinned. "I knowed it was Squib!" he declared vehemently.

Old Jim gazed at Sam speculatively. If there was anything old Jim detested it was to see a man under the influence of whisky. But, after all, Sam was Sam, and he needed hot coffee and food much more than he needed advice, just then. "Put up yore hosses," he said in a tone that conveyed the utter futility of other argument.

Sam obeyed mechanically.

While old Jim prepared supper, Sam sat outside on the bench and stroked Squib, meanwhile gazing at his own feet as though they were aliens and objects of great curiosity. From the cabin came the sudden and aggressive chant of the cuckoo declaiming the half hour. "I see you got that there wooden canary yit," he called to old Jim. But old Jim was too disgusted to take exception to the remark.

Sam was not hungry, and did not eat much. And the coffee tasted bitter. "Ain't you eatin'?" he inquired as old Jim moved about the kitchen.

"I had mine."

"Well, I guess I got *mine*," said Sam, endeavoring to be genial.

Old Jim did not comment. He was really more disgusted than angry, realizing that Sam had meant well enough by coming in and fetching the paper; yet old Jim could not but help think that, had Sam been sober, he would not have come. And in that he unwittingly did Sam an injustice. Sam had planned to visit his old friend before the meeting with Chet.

Naturally, Sam forgot why he had come—to apologize for anything he might have said hastily. The thought uppermost in Sam's mind was their usual game of pinochle. When they stepped to the larger room, Sam took up the cards and shuffled them. The coffee seemed to have cleared his head. The cuckoo declared insolently that it was eight o'clock.

Through habit they sat down and began their game of cards. Old Jim won steadily. Sam's eyes became somber. Unused of recent years to heavy potations, his irritated stomach nerves telephoned to his brain for relief. But either the line was busy or the operator was asleep at the switchboard.

Presently the cuckoo popped out from behind the little doors and asserted that it was half past eight. Sam glanced up at the clock and then at his cards. Old Jim won that game.

"Ain't you feelin' good?" queried old Jim.

"Feelin' fine!" declared Sam, forcing an appearance of joviality.

"Well, somethin' has sure got you down. You ain't won a game to-night."

Ordinarily, this would have been the lightest of banter, not even a joke, merely conversation. But to Sam's mind it was premeditated insult. Suddenly he recalled that he had come to old Jim's place on the peaceful errand of patching up their recent difference—and old Jim had insulted him. "If I can't play——" he began, when the cuckoo popped out. Then he finished: "I kin—*coo-coo, coo-coo*—shoot!"

"Yo're drunk!" said old Jim. "Yo're—*coo-coo*—drunk!"

Sam reached down and slowly pulled Chet's gun and cocked it. Old Jim jumped up. "Don't you—*coo-coo*——"

But the deed was done. From the carved and gorgeous cuckoo clock there dangled some splinters and a spiral of wire—the remains of the inhabitant of a once melodious timepiece. The bird had cuck-ooed-his last.

"I got him!" declared Sam. "And don't you make a move for yore iron, or I'll git you, too!"

"My God, Sam! You gone crazy?"

"I got him," reiterated Sam with heavy satisfaction. He rose and pushed from the table. Keeping old Jim covered, he backed from the room.

Old Jim was stunned. Sam had gone crazy. The cuckoo clock was a wreck. And crowning the insult was the fact that Sam, his friend for years, had drawn a gun and threatened him in his own house. The occasion was too tremendous for words—even for action. Old Jim was not a coward, but he did hope that Sam Osborne would get away without taking a crack at Squib, or at one of the cabin windows. And Sam, staggering across the dooryard, fetched his pintos from the corral, hitched them to the buckboard—for as long as Sam could feel, he could hitch and drive a team—and swinging to the seat, he drove down the yard toward the gate.

It was about then that old Jim fully realized that Sam had somewhere accumulated enough whisky to make him crazy drunk.

Old Jim shuffled to the table, picked up the cards and, striding to the kitchen, thrust them in the stove. "And that's the end of that!"

He returned to the scene of the slaughter, sat down, crossed his legs, and smoked. "That there clock's sure gone up High Creek," he observed. "She cost me thirty-two dollars and express. And that's the end of that!"

Old Jim puffed reflectively for a while. "Sam Osborne, he done insulted me in my own house, pullin' a gun on me, and then drivin' home drunker'n a Magdaleno fiddler. And that's the end of that!"

For a long while old Jim cogitated, puffing at his pipe. Apparently he was as calm as ever; but it was the calmness of a superlative hatred. "He's got a goat and a no-account hen, and two hosses." Old Jim checked the items off on his fingers. "Thinks more of 'em than he does of his whole dam' claim. Now, if he was to wake up some mornin' and find 'em gone——" Just then Squib, who had left hastily, slunk into the room and darted round the wall. "And a cat," continued old Jim who, had forgotten Sam's tomcat, Blue, for the moment. "And the first time that low-bellied, sneakin', rat snatcher comes prowlin' round this here claim—it'll be the last time. And that's the end of that!"

Old Jim rose and stepped up to the clock. He yanked it from the wall, carried it to the kitchen, and taking the covers off the wood stove, he thrust the clock in and replaced the covers. Then he took his almanac from its nail, found the day of the month, and marked it with a blue pencil. "Huh! Had that clock jest thirty-two days, and she cost me a dollar a day."

Presently the faint odor of burning wood drifted to the room where old Jim sat. It was not the odor of burning juniper, nor cedar, oak, cottonwood, or pine. Old Jim sniffed. The cuckoo clock was smoldering to extinction.

"And if Sam Osborne don't wish he was dead, afore I git through with him, it'll be because I'm dead afore I git through."

Old Jim made this statement audibly, calmly, deliberately.

Then he pulled out his watch. It was time to go to bed.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

Poor Man's Rock

By Bertrand W. Sinclair

Author of "Burned Bridges," "One Good Turn," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Jack MacCrae comes home to Vancouver, from the war, to find his father dying, and to learn that the acres on Squitty Island, which would have been his inheritance, had come into the hands of Horace Gower, head of the Folly Bay salmon cannery. Years ago, Gower, a power in the salmon industry, had been able to force the sweetheart of Jack's father to marry him, and had harassed Jack's father ever since. At his father's death, MacCrae decides to go into the salmon industry himself, as an independent buyer from the salmon fishers. He does so, both to make a living and to fight Gower's grinding methods with the fishermen. To this end he forms an alliance with his old friend, "Stubby" Abbott, now head of the Crow Harbor Canning Company —Abbott chartering him a boat with which to collect the salmon which his cannery needs. Meanwhile, somewhat to his embarrassment, because of his hatred of her father, MacCrae has once or twice met Gower's daughter Betty.

(*A Four-Part Story—Part Two*)

CHAPTER VIII.

SEA BOOTS AND SALMON.

FROM November to April the B. C. coast is a region of weeping skies, of intermittent frosts and fog, and bursts of sleety snow. The frosts, fogs, and snow squalls are the punctuation points, so to speak, of the eternal rain. Murky vapors eddy and swirl along the coast. The sun hides behind gray banks of cloud, the shining face of him a rare miracle bestowed upon the sight of men as a promise that bright days and blossoming flowers will come again. When they do come the coast is a pleasant country. The mountains reveal themselves, duskily green upon the lower slopes, their sky-piercing summits crowned with snow-caps which endure until the sun comes to his full strength in July. The gulf is a vista of purple-distant shore and island, of shimmering sea. And the fishermen come out of winter quarters to overhaul boats and gear against the first salmon run.

The blueback, a lively and toothsome fish, about which rages an ichthyological argument as to whether he is a distinct variety of the salmon tribe or merely a half-grown coho, is the first to show in great schools. The spring salmon is always in the gulf, but the spring is a finny mystery with no known rule for his comings and goings, nor his numbers. All the others—the blueback, the sockeye, the hump, the coho, and the dog salmon—run in the order named. They can be reckoned on as a man reckons on changes of the moon. These are the mainstay of the salmon canners. Upon their taking fortunes have been built, and squandered, men have lived and died, loved and hated, gone hungry, or dressed their women in silks and furs. The can of pink meat some inland chef dresses meticulously with parsley and sauces may have cost some fisherman his life; a multiplicity of cases of salmon may have produced a divorce in the packer's household. We eat this fine red flesh and heave its container into the garbage can, with no care for the tragedy or comedy that may have attended its getting for us.

In the spring, when life takes on a new prompting, the blueback salmon shows first in the gulf. He cannot be taken by net or bait—unless the bait be a small live herring. He may only be captured in commercial quantities by a spinner or a wabbling spoon hook of silver or brass or copper drawn through the water at slow speed. The dainty gear of the trout spinner gave birth to the trolling fleets of the Pacific coast.

At first the schools pass into the Straits of San Juan. Here the joint fleets of B. C. and of Puget Sound begin to harry them. A

week or ten days later the vanguard will be off Nanaimo. And in another week they will be breaking water like trout in a still pool around the rocky base of the Ballenas Light and the kelp beds and reefs of Squitty Island.

By the time they were there, in late April there were twenty local power boats to begin taking them, for Jack MacRae made the rounds of Squitty to tell the fishermen that he was putting on a carrier to take the first run of blueback to Vancouver markets.

They were a trifle pessimistic. Other buyers had tried it, men gambling on a shoestring for a stake in the fish trade, buyers unable to make regular trips whereby there was a tale of many salmon rotted in waiting fish holds, through depending on a carrier who did not come. What was the use of burning fuel, of tearing their fingers with the gear, of catching fish to rot? Better to leave them swim.

But since the Folly Bay cannery never opened until the fish ran to greater size and number, the fishermen, chaffing against inaction after an idle winter, took a chance and trolled for Jack MacRae.

To the trollers' surprise they found themselves dealing with a new type of independent buyer—a man who could and did make his market trips with clocklike precision. If MacRae left Squitty with a load on Monday saying that he would be at Squitty Cove or Jenkins Pass or Scottish Bay by Tuesday evening—he was there.

The risks and work and strain, perhaps because he put so much of himself into the thing, paid from the beginning, more than he had dared hope. He made a hundred dollars his first trip, paid the trollers five cents a fish more on the second trip, and cleared a hundred and fifty. In the second week of his venture he struck a market almost bare of fresh salmon with thirty-seven hundred shining bluebacks in his hold. He made seven hundred dollars on that single cargo.

A Greek buyer followed the *Blackbird* out through the Narrows that trip. MacRae beat him two hours to the trolling fleet at Squitty, a fleet that was growing in number.

"Bluebacks are thirty-five cents," he said to the first man who ranged alongside to deliver. "And I want to tell you something that you can talk over with the rest of the crowd. I have a market for every fish this bunch can catch. If I can't handle them with the *Blackbird* I'll put on another boat. I'm not here to buy fish just till the Folly Bay cannery opens. I'll be making regular trips to the end of the salmon season. My price will be as good as anybody's, better than some. If Gower gets your bluebacks this season for twenty-five cents it will be because you want to make him a present. Meantime, there's another buyer an hour behind me. I don't know what he'll pay. But whatever he pays there are'nt enough salmon being caught here yet to keep two carriers running. You can figure it out for yourself."

MacRae thought he knew his men. Nor was his judgment in error. The Greek hung around. In twenty-four hours he got three hundred salmon. MacRae loaded nearly three thousand.

When he had run a little over a month MacRae took stock. He paid the Crow Harbor Canning Company, which was Stubby Abbott's trading name, two hundred and fifty dollars a month charter for the *Blackbird*. He had operating outlay for gas, oil, crushed ice, and wages for Vincent Ferrara whom he took on when he reached the limit of single-handed endurance. Over and above these expenses he had cleared twenty-six hundred dollars.

That was only a beginning he knew, only a beginning of profits, and of work. He purposely thrust the taking of salmon on young Ferrara, let him handle the cash, tally in the fish, watched Vincent nonchalantly chuck out overripe salmon that careless trollers would as nonchalantly heave in for fresh ones if they could get away with it. For Jack MacRae had it in his mind to go as far and as fast as he could while the going was good.

Early in June MacRae went to Stubby Abbott.

"Have you sold the *Bluebird* yet?" he asked.

"I want to let three of those bird boats go," Stubby told him. "I don't need 'em. They're dead capital. But I haven't made a sale yet."

"Charter me the *Bluebird* on the same terms," Jack proposed.

"You're on. Things must be going good."

"Not too bad," MacRae admitted.

"Folly Bay opens the twentieth. We open July first," Stubby said abruptly. "How

many bluebacks are you going to get for us?"

"Just about all that are caught around Squitty Island," MacRae said quietly.

"Huh!" Stubby grunted. His tone was slightly incredulous. "You'll have to go some. Wish you luck though. More you get the better for me."

"I expect to deliver sixty thousand blueback to Crow Harbor in July," MacRae said.

Stubby stared at him. His eyes twinkled.

"If you can do that in July, and in August, too," he said, "I'll *give* you the *Bluebird*."

"No," MacRae smiled. "I'll buy her."

"Where will Folly Bay get off if you take that many fish away?" Stubby reflected.

"Don't know. And I don't care a hoot." MacRae shrugged his shoulders. "I'm fairly sure I can do it. You don't care?"

"Do I? I'll shout to the world I don't," Stubby replied. "It's self-preservation with me. Let old Horace look out for himself. He had his fingers in the pie while we were in France. I don't have to have four hundred per cent profit to do business. Get the fish if you can, Jack, old boy, even if it busts old Horace. Which it won't—and lack of them may bust me."

"By the way," Stubby said as MacRae rose to go. "Don't you ever have an hour to spare in town? You haven't been out at the house for six weeks."

MacRae held out his hands. They were red and cut and scarred, roughened and sore from salt water and ice-handling and fish slime.

"Wouldn't they look well clasping a wafer and a teacup?" and he laughed. "I'm working, Stub. When I have an hour to spare I lie down and sleep. If I stopped to play every time I came to town—do you think you'd get your sixty thousand bluebacks in July?"

Stubby looked at him, at his work-torn hands and weary eyes.

"I guess you're right," he said slowly. "But the old stone house will still be up on the corner when the salmon run is over. Don't forget that."

MacRae went off to Coal Harbor to take over the second carrier. And he wondered as he went if it would all be such clear sailing, if it were possible that at the first thrust he had found an open crack in Gower's armor through which he could prick the man and make him squirm.

CHAPTER IX.

VESTED RIGHTS.

A small balcony over the porch of Gower's summer cottage commanded a wide sweep of the gulf south and east. That was one reason he had built there. He liked to overlook the sea, out of which he had taken a fortune, the highway of his collecting boats. He had to keep in touch with the Folly Bay cannery while the rush of the pack was on. But he was getting more fastidious as he grew older, and he no longer relished the odors of the cannery.

On a day in mid-July Horace Gower stepped out on this balcony. He carried in his hand a pair of prism binoculars. He took a casual look round. Then he put the glasses to his eyes and scanned the gulf with a slow, searching sweep. At first sight it seemed empty. Then far eastward toward Vancouver his glass picked up two formless dots which alternately showed and disappeared.

Gower put down the glasses, seated himself in a grass chair, lighted a cigar, and leaned back looking impersonally down on Point Old and the Rock. A big, slow swell rolled up off the gulf, breaking with a precisely spaced *boom* along the cliffs. For forty-eight hours a southeaster had swept the sea, that rare phenomenon of a summer gale which did not blow itself out between suns. This had been a rare tantrum, driving everything of small tonnage to the nearest shelter, even delaying the big coasters.

One of these, trailing black smoke from two funnels, lifting white superstructure of cabins high above her main deck, standing out bold and clear in the mellow sunshine, steamed down the fairway between Squitty and Vancouver Island. But she gained scant heed from Gower. His eyes kept turning to where those distant specks showed briefly between periods in the hollows of the sea. They drew nearer. Gower finished his cigar in leisurely fashion. He focused the glass again. He grunted something unintelligible. They were what he fully expected to behold as soon as the southeaster ceased to whip the gulf—the *Bluebird* and the *Blackbird*, Jack MacRae's two salmon carriers. They were walking up to Squitty in eight-knot boots.

Gower laid aside the glasses. He smoked a second cigar down to a stub, resting his plump hands on his plump stomach. He resembled a thoughtful Billiken in white flan-

nels, a round-faced florid, middle-aged Billiken. By that time the two boats had come up and parted on the head of Squitty. The *Bluebird*, captained by Vin Ferrara, headed into the cove. The *Blackbird*, slashing along with a bone in her teeth, rounded Poor Man's Rock, cut across the mouth of Cradle Bay, and stood on up the western shore.

"He knows every pot hole where a troller can lie. He's not afraid of wind or sea or work. No wonder he gets the fish. Those damned——"

Gower cut his soliloquy off in the middle to watch the *Blackbird* slide out of sight behind a point. He knew all about Jack MacRae's operations, the wide swath he was cutting in the matter of blueback salmon. The Folly Bay showing to date was a pointed reminder.

He left the balcony at last. He appeared next moving with the stumpy ungraceful stride peculiar to the short and thick-bodies, down the walk to a float. From this he hailed the *Arrow*, and a boy came in rowing a dinghy.

When Gower reached the cruiser's deck he cocked his head at voices in the after cabin. He put his head through the companion hatch. Betty Gower and Nelly Abbott were curled up on a berth, chuckling to each other over some exchange of confidences.

"Thought you were ashore?" Gower grunted.

"Oh, the rest of the crowd went off on a hike into the woods, so we came out here to look around. Nelly hasn't seen the *Arrow* inside since it was done over," Betty replied.

"I'm going to Folly Bay," Gower said. "Will you go ashore?"

"Far from such," Betty returned. "I'd as soon go to the cannery as anywhere. Can't we, daddy?"

"Oh, yes. Bit of a swell though. You may be sick."

The *Arrow* was engined to justify her name. But the swell was heavier than it looked from shore. No craft, even a seventy-footer, built for speed, finds her speed lines a thing of comfort in heavy going. Until the *Arrow* passed into the lee of an island group halfway along Squitty she made less time than a fishing boat, and she rolled and twisted uncomfortably. If Horace Gower had a mind to reach Folly Bay before the *Blackbird* he could not have done so. However, he gave no hint of such intention. He kept to the deck. The girls stayed below until the big motor cruiser struck easier going and a faster gait. Then they joined Gower.

The three of them stood by the rail just abaft the pilot house when the *Arrow* turned into the half-mile breadth of Folly Bay. The cannery loomed white on shore, with a couple of purse seiners and a tender or two tied at the slips. And four hundred yards off the cannery wharf the *Blackbird* had dropped anchor and lay now, a dozen trolling boats clustered about her to deliver fish.

"Slow up and stop abreast of that buyer," Gower ordered.

The *Arrow's* skipper brought his vessel to a standstill within a boat length of the *Blackbird*.

"Why that's Jack MacRae," Nelly Abbott exclaimed. "Hoo-hoo, Johnny!"

She waved both hands for good measure. MacRae, bareheaded, sleeves rolled above his elbows, standing in hip boots of rubber on a deck wet and slippery with water and fish slime, amid piles of gleaming salmon, recognized her easily enough. He waved greeting, but his gaze only for that one recognizing instant left the salmon that were landing *flop, flop* on the *Blackbird's* deck out of a troller's fish well. He made out a slip and handed the troller some currency. There was a brief exchange of words between them. The man nodded, pushed off his boat. Instantly another edged into the vacant place. Salmon began to fall on the deck, heaved up on a picaroon. At the other end of the fish hold another of the Ferrara boys was tallying in fish.

"Old crab," Nelly Abbott murmured. "He doesn't even look at us."

"He's counting salmon, silly," Betty explained. "How can he?"

There was no particular inflection in her voice. Nevertheless, Horace Gower shot a sidelong glance at his daughter. She also waved a hand pleasantly to Jack MacRae, who had faced about now.

"Why don't you say you're glad to see us, old dear?" Nelly Abbott suggested bluntly, and smiling so that all her white teeth gleamed and her eyes twinkled mischievously.

"Tickled to death," MacRae called back. He went through the pantomime of shaking hands with himself. His lips parted in a smile. —"But I'm the busiest thing afloat right now. See you later."

"Nerve," Horace Gower muttered under his breath.

He turned back to his work. The fisherman alongside was tall and surly looking. He heaved half a dozen salmon up on the *Blackbird*. Then he climbed up himself. He towered over Jack MacRae, and MacRae was not exactly a small man. He said something, his hands on his hips. MacRae looked at him. He seemed to be making some reply. And he stepped back from the man. Every other fisherman turned his face toward the *Blackbird's* deck. Their talk stopped short.

The man leaned forward. His hands left his hips, drew into doubled fists extended threateningly. He took a step toward MacRae.

And MacRae suddenly lunged forward, as if propelled by some invisible spring of tremendous force. With incredible swiftness his left hand and then his right shot at the man's face. The two blows sounded like two open-handed smacks. But the fisherman sagged, went lurching backward. His heels caught on the *Blackbird's* bulwark and he pitched backward headfirst into the hold of his own boat.

MacRae picked up the salmon and flung them one by one after the man, with no great haste but with little care where they fell, for one or two spatted against the fellow's face as he clawed up out of his own hold. There was a smear of red on his lips.

"Oh! My goodness gracious, sakes alive!"

Nelly Abbott grasped Betty by the arm and murmured these expletives as much in a spirit of devilishness as of shock. Her eyes danced.

"Did you see that?" she whispered. "I never saw two men fight before."

But Betty was holding her breath, for MacRae had picked up a twelve-foot pike pole, a thing with an ugly point and a hook of iron on its tip. He only used it, however, to shove away the boat containing the man he had so savagely smashed. And while he did that Gower curtly issued an order and the *Arrow* slid on to the cannery wharf.

Nelly went below for something. Betty stood by the rail, staring back thoughtfully, unaware that her father was keenly watching the look on her face, with an odd expression in his own eyes.

"You saw quite a lot of young MacRae last spring, didn't you?" he asked abruptly. "Do you like him?"

A faint touch of color leaped into her cheeks. She met her father's glance with an inquiring one of her own.

"Well—yes, rather," she said at last. "He's a nice boy."

Gower's frown grew deeper. His teeth clamped a cigar in one corner of his mouth at an aggressive angle. "I'd suggest that you don't cultivate any romantic fancy for him. Because he's making himself a nuisance in my business—and I'm going to smash him."

"As if I——" she left the whispered sentence unfinished.

She perched herself on the mahogany-capped rail and, while she waited for Nelly Abbott, she gave herself up to thinking of herself and her father and her father's amazing warning which carried a veiled threat—an open threat so far as Jack MacRae was concerned. Why should he cut loose like that on her?

She stared thoughtfully at the *Blackbird*, marked the trollers slipping in from the grounds and clustering around the chunky carrier.

It might have interested Mr. Horace Gower could he have received a verbatim report of his daughter's reflections for the next five minutes. But whether it would have pleased him is hard to say.

When MacRae had dropped his hook in Folly Bay he was two days overdue, for the first time in his fish-running venture. The trollers had promised to hold their fish. The first man alongside to deliver reminded him of this.

"Southeaster held up, eh?" said he. "We fished in the lee off the top end. But we might as well have laid in. Held 'em too long for you."

"They spoiled before you could slough them on the cannery, eh?" MacRae observed.

"Most of mine did. They took some."

"How many of your fish went bad?" Jack asked.

"About twenty-five, I guess."

MacRae finished checking the salmon the fisherman heaved up on the deck. He made out two slips and handed the man his money.

"I'm paying you for the lost fish," he said. "I told you to hold them for me. I want

you to hold them. If I can't get here on time it's my loss, not yours."

The fisherman looked at the money in his hand and up at MacRae.

"Well," he said. "You're the first buyer I ever seen do that. You're all right, all right."

There were variations of this. Some of the trollers, weatherwise old sea dogs, had foreseen that the *Blackbird* could not face that blow, and they had sold their fish. Others had held on. These, all of whom MacRae knew, were paid according to their own estimate of loss. He did not argue. He accepted their word. It was an astonishing experience for the trolling fleet. They had never found a buyer willing to make good a loss of that kind.

But there were other folk afloat besides simple, honest fishermen. When the *Arrow* drew abreast and stopped a boat had pushed in beside the *Blackbird*. The fisherman in it put a half dozen bluebacks on the deck and clambered up himself.

"You owe me for thirty besides them," he announced.

"How's that?" MacRae asked coolly.

But he was not cool inside. He knew the man, a preëmptor near Folly Bay, a truckler to the cannery because he was always in debt to the cannery—and a quarrelsome individual besides who took advantage of his size and strength to browbeat less able men.

MacRae had got few salmon off Sam Kaye since the cannery opened. He had never asked Kaye to hold fish for him. He knew instantly what was in Kaye's mind; it had flitted from one boat to another that MacRae was making good the loss of salmon held for him, and Kaye was going to get in on this easy money if he could bluff it through.

Kaye was simply trying to do him out of fifteen dollars. MacRae knew it. He knew that the fishermen knew it—and he had a suspicion that Folly Bay might not be unaware, or averse to Sam Kaye taking a fall out of him. Folly Bay had tried other unpleasant tricks.

"That doesn't go for you, Kaye," he said quietly. "I know your game. Get off my boat, and take your fish with you."

Sam Kaye glowered threateningly. He had cowed men before with the fierceness of his look. He took a step forward with an intimidating thrust of his jaw.

MacRae caught him squarely in the mouth with a straight left, and hooked him somewhere on the jaw with a wicked right cross. Either blow was sufficient to knock any ordinary man down. There was a deceptive power in MacRae's slenderness, which was not so much slenderness as perfect bodily symmetry. He weighed within ten pounds as much as Sam Kaye, although he did not look it, and he was as quick as a playful kitten. Kaye went down. Later he lifted a dazed countenance above the cockpit as MacRae shoved his craft clear. The fishermen broke the silence with ribald laughter.

CHAPTER X.

A WOMAN'S PROMISE.

The *Blackbird* went her rounds. At noon the next day she met Vincent Ferrara with her sister ship, and the two boats made one load for the *Blackbird*. She headed south. With high noon, too, came the summer westerly, screeching and whistling and lashing the gulf to a brief fury. It was the regular summer wind, a yachtman's gale. Four days out of six its cycle ran the same, a breeze rising at ten o'clock, stiffening to a healthy blow, falling to a mere sigh at sundown. Midnight would find the sea smooth as a mirror, the heaving swell killed by changing tides. So the *Blackbird* ran down Squitty, rolling and yawing through a following sea, and turned into Squitty Cove to rest till night and calm settled on the gulf.

When her mudhook was down in that peaceful nook, Steve Ferrara turned into his bunk to get a few hours' sleep against the long night watch. MacRae was wakeful on the sun-hot deck, occasionally slushing it down with buckets of sea water to save his ice and fish. He coiled ropes, made his vessel neat, and then sat him down to think. Squitty Cove always stirred him to introspection. His mind leaped always to the manifold suggestions of any well-remembered place.

He slid overboard the small skiff the *Blackbird* carried and rowed ashore. There were rowboat trollers on the bench asleep in their tents and rude lean-tos. He walked over the low ridge behind which stood Peter Ferrara's house. It was hot, the wooded heights of the island shutting off the cool westerly. On such a day Peter Ferrara should be dozing on his porch and Dolly perhaps mending stockings or sewing in a rocker beside him.

But the porch was bare. As MacRae drew near a man came out the door, down the three low steps. He was short and thickset, young, quite fair, inclined already to floridness of skin. MacRae knew him at once for Norman Gower. He was a typical Gower —a second edition of his father, save that his face was less suggestive of power, less heavily marked with sullenness.

He glanced with blank indifference at Jack MacRae, passed within six feet and walked away along the path which ran around the head of the cove.

MacRae walked into old Peter's house without announcement beyond his footsteps on the floor, as he had been accustomed to do as far back as he could remember. Dolly was sitting beside a little table, her chin in her palms. There was a droop to her body that disturbed MacRae. She had sat for hours like that the night his father died. And there was now on her face something of the same look of sad resignation and pity. Her big, dark eyes were misty, troubled, when she lifted them to MacRae.

"Hello, Jack," she said.

He came up to her, put his hands on her shoulders.

"What is it, now?" he demanded. "I saw Norman Gower leaving as I came up. And here you're looking—what's wrong?"

His tone was imperative.

"Nothing, Johnny."

"You don't cry for nothing. You're not that kind," MacRae replied. "That chunky lobster hasn't given you the glooms, surely?"

Dolly's eyes flashed.

"It isn't like you to call names," she declared. "It isn't nice. And—and what business of yours is it whether I laugh or cry?"

MacRae smiled. Dolly in a temper was not wholly strange to him. He was struck with her remarkable beauty, every time he saw her lately. She was altogether too beautiful a flower to be blushing unseen on an island in the gulf. He shook her gently.

"Because I'm big brother. Because you and I were kids together for years before we ever knew there could be serpents in Eden. Because anything that hurts you hurts me. I'd wring Norman Gower's chubby neck with great pleasure if I thought he could do that. I didn't even know you knew him."

Dolly dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief.

"There are lots of things you don't know, Jack MacRae," she murmured. "Besides, why shouldn't I know Norman?"

"Why, I suppose it really is none of my business," he said slowly. "Except that I can't help being concerned in anything that makes you unhappy. That's all."

He sat down on the arm of her chair and patted her cheek. To his utter amazement Dolly broke into a storm of tears. Long ago he had seen her cry when she had hurt herself or because he had teased her or because she was angry or disappointed. He had never seen any woman cry as she did now. It was not just simple grieved weeping. It was a tempest that shook her. Her body quivered, her breath came in gasping bursts between racking sobs.

MacRae gathered her into his arms, trying to dam that wild flood. She put her face against him and clung there trembling like some hunted animal seeking refuge, mysteriously stirring him with the passionate abandon of her tears, filling him with vague apprehensions, with a strange excitement.

Like the tornado, swift in its striking and passing, so this storm passed. Dolly's sobbing ceased. She rested passively in his arms for a minute. Then she sighed, brushed the cloudy hair out of her eyes, and looked up at him.

"I hope nothing like it ever comes to you, Jack. I'm bleeding internally. Oh, it hurts, it hurts!"

She laid her head against him and cried again, softly.

"Tell me," he whispered.

"Why not?" she lifted her head after a little. "You could always keep things to yourself. It wasn't much wonder they called you Silent John. Do you know I never really grasped 'The Ancient Mariner, until now? People *must* tell their troubles to some one—or they'd corrode inside."

"Go ahead."

"When Norman Gower went overseas we were engaged," she said bluntly, and stopped. She was not looking at MacRae now. She stared at the opposite wall, her fingers locked together in her lap.

"For four years," she went on, "I've been hoping, dreaming, waiting, loving. To-day he came home to tell me that he married in England two years ago. Married in the madness of a drunken hour—that is how he puts it—a girl who didn't care for anything but the good time his rank and pay could give her."

"I think you're in luck," MacRae said soberly.

"What queer creatures men are," she seemed not to have heard him—to be thinking her own thoughts out loud. "He says he loves me, that he has loved me all the time, that he feels as if he had been walking in his sleep and fallen into some muddy hole. And I believe him. It's terrible, Johnny."

"It's impossible," MacRae declared savagely. "If he's got in that kind of a hole, let him stay there. You're well out of it. You ought to be glad."

"But I'm not," she said sadly. "I'm not made that way. I can't let a thing become a vital part of my life, and give it up without a pang."

"I don't see what else you can do," MacRae observed. "Only brace up and forget it."

"It isn't quite so simple as that," she sighed. "Norman's w—this woman presently got tired of him. Evidently she had no scruples about getting what she wanted, nor how. She went away with another man. Norman is getting a divorce—the decree absolute will be granted in March next. He wants me to marry him."

"Will you?"

Dolly looked up to meet MacRae's wondering stare. She nodded.

"You're a triple-plated fool," he said roughly.

"I don't know," she replied thoughtfully. "Norman certainly has been. Perhaps I am, too. We should get on—a pair of fools together."

The bitterness in her voice stung MacRae.

"You should have loved me," he said. "And I you."

"But you don't, Jack. You have never thought of that before."

"I could, quite easily."

Dolly considered this a moment.

"No," she said. "You like me. I know that, Johnny. I like you, too. You are a man, and I'm a woman. But if you weren't bursting with sympathy you wouldn't have thought of that. If Norman had some of your backbone—but it wouldn't make any difference. Norman Gower has made me dreadfully unhappy. But I loved him before he went away, and I love him yet. I want him just the same. And he says—he says—that he never stopped caring for me—that it was like a bad dream. I believe him. I'm sure of it. He didn't lie to me. And I can't hate him. I can't punish him without punishing myself. I don't want to punish him, any more than I would want to punish a baby, if I had one, for a naughtiness it couldn't help."

"So you'll marry him eventually?" MacRae asked.

Dolly nodded.

"If he doesn't change his mind," she murmured. "Oh, I shouldn't say ugly things like that. It sounds cheap and mean. But it hurts, it hurts me so to think of it," she broke out passionately. "I can forgive him, because I can see how it happened. Still it hurts. I feel cheated—cheated!"

And MacRae, conscious that she had said her say, feeling that she wanted to be alone, as he himself always wanted to fight a grief or a hurt alone and in silence, walked out into the sunshine, where the westerly droned high above in the swaying fir tops.

CHAPTER XI.

THRUST AND COUNTERTHRUST.

By the time Jack MacRae was writing August on his sales slips he was conscious of an important fact; namely, that nearly a hundred gas-boat fishermen trolling Squitty Island, the Ballenas, Gray Rock, even farther afield to Yellow Rock Light and Lambert Channel, were compactly behind him. They were still close to a period when they had been remorselessly exploited. They were all for MacRae. Prices being equal, they preferred he should have their fish. It was still vividly in their astonished minds that he had shared profits with them without compulsion, that he had boosted prices without competition, had put a great many dollars in their pockets. Only those who earn a living as precariously, as riskily, and with so much patient labor as a salmon fisherman, can so well value a dollar.

The Folly Bay collectors fared little better than outside buyers. In July Gower met MacRae's price by two successive raises. He stopped at that. MacRae did not. Each succeeding run of salmon averaged greater poundage. They were worth more. MacRae paid fifty, fifty-five cents. When Gower stood pat at fifty-five MacRae gave up a fourth of his contract percentage and paid sixty. It was like draw poker with the advantage of the last raise on his side.

The salmon were worth the price. They were worth double to a cannery that lay

mostly idle for lack of fish. The salmon now were running close to six pounds each. The finished product was eighteen dollars a case in the market. There are forty-eight one-pound cans in a case. To a man familiar with packing costs it is a simple sum. MacRae often wondered why Gower stubbornly refused to pay more, when his collecting boats came back to the cannery so often with a few scattered salmon in their holds. They were primitive folk, these salmon trollers. They jeered the unlucky collectors. Gower was losing his fishermen as well as his fish. For the time, at least, the back of his long-held monopoly was broken.

MacRae got a little further light on this attitude from Stubby Abbott.

"He's figuring on making out a season's pack with cohoes, humps, and dog salmon," Stubby told MacRae at the Crow Harbor cannery. "He expects to work his purse seiners overtime, and to hell with the individual fisherman. Norman was telling me. Old Horace has put Norman in charge at Folly Bay, you know."

MacRae nodded. He knew about that.

"The old boy is sore as a boil at you and me," Stubby chuckled. "I don't blame him much. He has had a cinch there so long he thinks it's his private pond. You've certainly put a crimp in the Folly Bay blueback pack—to my great benefit. I don't suppose any one but you could have done it, either."

"Any one could," MacRae declared, "if he knew the waters, the men, and was wise enough to play the game square. The trouble has been that each buyer wanted to make a clean-up on each trip. He wanted easy money. The salmon fisherman away up the coast practically has to take what is offered him day by day, or throw his fish overboard. Canneries and buyers alike have systematically given him the worst of the deal. You don't cut your cannery hands' pay because on certain days your pack falls off?"

"Hardly."

"But canneries and collectors and every independent buyer have always used any old pretext to cut the price to the fisherman out on the grounds. And while a fisherman has to take what he is offered he doesn't have to keep on taking it. He can quit, and try something else. Lots of them have done that. That's why there are three Japanese to every white salmon fisherman on the B. C. coast. That is why we have an Oriental problem. The Japs are making the canneries squeal, aren't they?"

"Rather." Stubby smiled. "They are getting to be a bit of a problem."

"The packers got them in here as cheap labor in the salmon fishing," MacRae went on. "The white fisherman was too independent. He wanted all he could get out of his work. He was a kicker, as well as a good fisherman. The packers thought they could keep wages down and profits up by importing the Jap—cheap labor with a low standard of living. And the Jap has turned the tables on the big fellows. They hang together, as aliens always do in a strange country, and the war has helped them freeze the white fisherman out on one hand and exact more and more from the canneries on the other. And that would never have happened if this had been kept a white man's country, and the white fisherman had got a square deal."

"To buy as cheaply as you can and sell for as much as you can," Stubby reminded him, "is a fundamental of business. You can't get away from it. My father abandoned that maxim the last two years of his life, and it nearly broke us. He was a public-spirited man. He took war and wartime conditions to heart. In a period of jumping food costs he tried to give people cheaper food. As I said, he nearly went broke trying to do a public service. Because no one else in the same business departed from the business rule of making all they could. In fact, men in the same business, I have since learned, were the first to sharpen their knives for him. He was establishing a bad precedent. I don't know but their attitude is sound, after all. In sheer self-defense a man must make all he can when he has a chance. You cannot indulge in philanthropy in a business undertaking these days."

"Granted," MacRae made answer. "I don't propose being a philanthropist myself. But you will get farther with a salmon fisherman, or any other man whose labor you must depend on, if you accept the principle that he is entitled to make a dollar as well as yourself, if you don't stretch every point to take advantage of his necessity. These fellows who fish around Squitty have been gouged and cheated a lot. They aren't fools. They know pretty well who makes the long profit, who pile up moderate fortunes while they get only a living, and not a particularly good living at that."

"Are you turning bolshevik?" Stubby inquired with mock solicitude.

MacRae smiled. "Hardly. Nor are the fishermen. They know I'm making money. But they know also that they are getting more out of it than they ever got before, and that if I were not on the job they would get a lot less."

"They certainly would," Abbott drawled. "You have been, and are now, paying more for blueback salmon than any buyer on the gulf."

"Well, it has paid me. And it has been highly profitable to you, hasn't it?" MacRae said. "You've had a hundred thousand salmon to pack, which you would not otherwise have had."

Stubby poked thoughtfully with a pencil at the blotter on his desk.

"Well, Jack, I may as well be quite frank with you," he said at last. "I have had hints that may mean something. The big run will be over at Squitty in another month. I don't believe I can be dictated to on short notice. But I cannot positively say. If you can see your way to carry on it will be quite a relief to me. Another season it may be different."

"I think I can."

But though MacRae said this confidently, he was privately not so sure. From the very beginning he had expected pressure to come on Stubby, as the active head of Crow Harbor. It was as Stubby said. Unless he —MacRae—had a market for his fish, he could not buy. And within the limits of B. C. the salmon market was subject to control; by just what means MacRae had got inklings here and there. He had not been deceived by the smoothness of his operations so far. Below the clear horizon there was a storm gathering. A man like Gower did not lie down and submit passively to being beaten at his own game.

So MacRae, knowing that Stubby must protect himself in a show-down, set about fortifying his own approaches. For a first move he hired an engineer, put Steve Ferrara in charge of the *Blackbird*, and started him back to Squitty. Then MacRae took the next train to Bellingham, a cannery town which looks out on the southern end of the Gulf of Georgia from the American side of the boundary. He extended his journey to Seattle. Altogether he was gone three days.

When he came back he made a series of calls—at the Vancouver offices of three different canneries and one of the biggest cold-storage concerns on the Pacific coast. He got a courteous but unsatisfactory reception from the cannery men. He fared little better with the manager of the cold-storage plant. This gentleman was tentatively agreeable in the matter of purchasing salmon, but rather vague in the way of terms.

"Beginning with May next I can deliver any quantity up to two thousand a day, perhaps more, for a period of about four months," MacRae stated. "What I should like to know is the percentage over the up-coast price you would pay."

But he could not pin the man down to anything definite. He would only speak pleasantly of the market and possible arrangements, utter vague commonplaces in business terminology. MacRae rose.

"I'm wasting your time and my own," he said. "You don't want my fish. Why not say so?"

"We always want fish," the man declared, bending a shrewdly appraising eye on MacRae. "Bring in the salmon and we will do business."

"On your own terms, when my carriers are tied to your dock with a capacity load which I must sell or throw overboard within forty-eight hours," and MacRae smiled. "No, I don't intend to go up against any take-it-or-leave proposition like that. I don't have to."

But MacRae was not downcast. He was only sober and thoughtful, which had become characteristic with him in the last four months. He was forgetting how to laugh, to be buoyant, to see the world through the rose-colored glasses of sanguine youth. He was becoming a living exemplar of his nickname. Even Stubby Abbott marked this when Jack came back from Bellingham.

"Come on out to the house," Stubby urged. "Your men can handle the job a day or two longer. Forget the grind for once. It's getting you."

"No, I don't think it is," MacRae denied. "But a man can't play and produce at the same time. I have to keep going."

He did go out to Abbott's one evening, however, and suffered a good deal of teasing from Nelly over his manhandling of Sam Kaye. A lot of other young people happened to forgather there. They sang and flirted, and presently moved the rugs off the living-room floor and danced to a phonograph. MacRae found himself a little out of it, by

inclination. He was tired, without knowing quite what was the matter with him. A man, even a young and sturdy man, cannot work like a horse for months on end, eating his meals anyhow and sleeping when he can, without losing temporarily the zest for careless fun. For another thing, he found himself looking at these immaculate young people as any hard-driven worker must perforce look upon drones.

And MacRae found himself wondering what they gave or ever expected to give in return for this pleasant security of mind and body. Some one had to pay for it, the silks and georgettes and white flannels, furs and strings of pearls and gold trinkets, the good food, the motor cars, and the fun.

He knew a little of every one he met there that evening, for in Vancouver as in any other community which has developed a social life beyond the purely primitive stages of association, people gravitate into sets and cliques. They lived in good homes, they had servants, they week-ended here and there. Of the dozen or more young men and women there, only himself and Stubby Abbott made any pretense at work.

The *Blackbird* had discharged at Crow Harbor late in the afternoon. She lay now at a Vancouver slip. By eleven o'clock he was aboard in his bunk, still thinking when he should have been asleep, staring wide-eyed at dim deck beams, his mind flitting restlessly from one thing to another. Steve Ferrara lay in the opposite bunk, wheezing his breath in and out of lungs seared by poison gas in Flanders. Smells of seaweed and tide-flat wafted in through open hatch and portholes. A full moon thrust silver fingers through deck openings. Gradually the softened medley of harbor noises lulled MacRae into a dreamless sleep. He only wakened at the clank of the engine and the shudder of the *Blackbird's* timbers as Steve backed her out of her berth in the first faint gleam of dawn.

The *Blackbird* made her trip, and a second and a third, which brought the date well into August. On this delivery, when the salmon in her hold had been picarooned to the cannery floor, MacRae went up to the office. Stubby had sent for him.

"What's on your mind now?" MacRae asked genially.

"Something damned unpleasant," Stubby growled.

"Shoot," MacRae said. He sat down and lit a cigarette.

"I didn't think they could do it," Abbott said slowly. "But it seems they can. I guess you'll have to lay off the Gower territory after all, Jack."

"You mean *you* will," MacRae replied. "I've been rather expecting that. Can Gower hurt you?"

"Not personally. But the banks—export control—there are so many angles to the cannery situation. There's nothing openly threatened. But it has been made perfectly clear to me that I'll be hampered and harassed till I won't know whether I'm afoot or on horseback, if I go on paying a few cents more for salmon in order to keep my plant working efficiently. Damn it, I hate it. But I'm in no position to clash with the rest of the cannery crowd and the banks, too. I hate to let you down. You've pulled me out of a hole. I don't know a man who would have worked at your pitch and carried things off the way you have. If I had this pack marketed, I could snap my fingers at them. But I haven't. There's the rub. I hate to ditch you in order to insure myself—get in line at somebody else's dictation."

"Don't worry about me," MacRae said gently. "I have no cannery and no pack to market through the regular channels. Nor has the bank advanced me any funds. You are not responsible for what I do. And neither Gower nor the packers association nor the banks can stop me from buying salmon so long as I have the money to pay the fishermen and carriers to haul them, can they?"

"No, but the devil of it is they can stop you *selling*," Stubby lamented. "I tell you there isn't a cannery on the gulf will pay you a cent more than they pay the fishermen. What's the use of buying if you can't sell?"

MacRae did not attempt to answer that.

"Let's sum it up," he said. "You can't take any more bluebacks from Gower's territory. That, I gather, is the chief object. I suppose they know as much about your business as you know yourself. Am I to be deprived of the two boat charters into the bargain?"

"No, by the Lord," Stubby swore. "Not if you want them. My general policy may be subject to dictation, but not the petty details of my business. There's a limit. I won't stand for that."

"Put a fair price on the *Birds* and I'll buy

'em both," MacRae suggested. "You had them up for sale, anyway. That will let you out, so far as my equipment is concerned."

"Five thousand each," Stubby said promptly. "They're good value at that. And I can use ten thousand dollars to advantage, right now."

"I'll give you a check. I want the registry transferred to me at once," MacRae continued. "That done, you can cease worrying over me, Stub. You've been square, and I've made money on the deal. You would be foolish to fight unless you have a fighting chance. Oh, another thing. Will the Terminal shut off on me, too?"

"No," Stubby declared. "The Terminal is one of the weapons I intend ultimately to use as a club on the heads of this group of gentlemen who want to make a close corporation of the salmon industry on the British Columbia coast. If I get by this season I shall be in shape to show them something. They will not bother about the Terminal, because the Terminal is small. All the salmon they could take from you wouldn't hurt Gower. What they want is to enable Gower to get up his usual fall pack. It has taken him this long to get things shaped so he could call me off. He can't reach a local concern like the Terminal. No, the Terminal will continue to buy salmon from you, Jack. But you know they haven't the facilities to handle a fourth of the salmon you have been running lately."

"I'll see they get whatever they can use," MacRae declared. "And if it is any satisfaction to you personally, Stub, I can assure you that I shall continue to do business as usual."

Stubby looked curious.

"You've got something up your sleeve?"

"Yes," MacRae admitted. "No stuffed club, either. It's loaded. You wait and keep your ears open."

"You appear to like old Horace," Stubby said thoughtfully, "about as much as our fellows used to like Fritz when he dropped high explosives on supposedly bomb-proof shelters."

"Just about as much," MacRae said shortly. "Well, you'll transfer that registry —when? I want to get back to Squitty as soon as possible."

"I'll go to town with you now, if you like," Stubby offered.

They acted on that. Within two hours MacRae was the owner of two motor launches under British registry. Payment in full left him roughly five thousand dollars working capital, enough by a narrow margin. At sunset Vancouver was a smoky smudge on a far horizon. At dusk he passed in the narrow mouth of Squitty Cove. The *Bluebird* was swinging about to go when her sister ship ranged alongside. Vincent Ferrara dropped his hook again. There were forty trollers in the cove. MacRae called to them. They came in skiffs and dinghys, and when they were all about his stern and some perched in sea boots along the *Blackbird's* low bulwarks MacRae said what he had to say.

"Gower has come alive. My market for fish bought in Gower's territory is closed, so far as Crow Harbor is concerned. If I can't sell salmon I can't buy them from you. How much do you think Folly Bay will pay for your fish?"

He waited a minute. The fishermen looked at him in the yellow lantern light, at each other. They shifted uneasily. No one answered his question.

MacRae went on: "You can guess what will happen. You will be loser. So will I. I don't like the idea of being frozen out of the salmon-buying business, now that I have got my hand in. I don't intend to be. As long as I can handle a load of salmon I'll make the run. But I've got to run them farther, and you fellows will have to wait a bit for me now and then, perhaps. The cannery men hang together. They are making it bad for me, because I'm paying a few cents more for salmon. They have choked off Crow Harbor. Gower is hungry for cheap salmon. He'll get them, too, if you let him head off outside buyers. Since I'm the only buyer covering these grounds it's up to you, more than ever, to see that I keep coming. That's all. Tell the rest of the fishermen what I say as you run across each other."

MacRae smiled contentedly as the men moved away. There was a long run ahead. But he felt that he had beaten Gower in this first definite brush. Moving in devious channels to a given end Gower had closed the natural markets to MacRae. But there was no law against the export of raw salmon to a foreign country. MacRae could afford to smile. Over in Bellingham there were salmon packers who, like Folly Bay, were hungry for fish to feed their great machines. But—unlike Folly Bay—they were willing

to pay the price, any price in reason, for a supply of salmon. Their own carriers later in the season would invade Canadian waters, so many thorns in the ample sides of the B. C. packers. "The damned Americans," they sometimes growled, and talked about legislation to keep American fish buyers out. Because the American buyer and canner alike would spend a dollar to make a dollar. And the B. C. packers wanted a cinch, a monopoly, which in a measure they had. They were an anachronism, MacRae felt. They regarded the salmon and the salmon waters of the B. C. coast as the feudal barons of old jealously regarded their special prerogatives. MacRae could see them growling and grumbling, he could see most clearly the scowl that would spread over the face of Mr. Horace P. Gower, when he learned that ten to twenty thousand Squitty Island salmon were passing down the gulf each week to an American cannery, that a smooth-faced boy out of the air service was putting a crimp in the ancient order of things so far as one particular cannery was concerned.

CHAPTER XII.

PERILS OF THE SEA.

The last of August set the Red Flower of the Jungle Books blooming along the B. C. coast. The seeds of it were scattered on hot, dry, still days by pipe and cigarette, by sparks from donkey engines, or by untended camp fires, wherever the careless white man went in the great coastwise forests. The woods were like a tinder box. One unguarded moment, and the ancient firs were wrapped in sheets of flame. Smoke lay on the gulf like a pall of pungent fog, through which vessels ran by chart and compass, blind between ports, at imminent risk of collision.

Through this, well on into September, MacRae and Vincent Ferrara gathered cargoes of salmon and ran them down the gulf to Bellingham, making their trips with the regularity of the tides despite the murk that hid landmarks by day and obscured the guiding lighthouse flashes when dark closed in. They took their chances in the path of coastwise traffic, straining their eyes for vessels to leap suddenly out of the murkiness, their ears for fog signals that blared warning. There were close shaves, but they escaped disaster. They got the salmon and they delivered them ,and Folly Bay still ran a bad second wherever the *Bird* boats served the trolling fleet. Even when Gower at last met MacRae's price, his collectors got few fish. The fishermen took no chances. They were convinced that if MacRae abandoned buying for lack of salmon Folly Bay would cut the price in two. It had been done before. So they held their fish for the *Bird* boats.

While the coho and the humpback, which came about the same time, and the dog salmon which comes last of all—but each to function in the same manner and sequence—lay in the salt water bays, resting, it would seem, before the last and most terrible struggle of their brief existence, the gill-net fishermen and the cannery purse-seine boats took toll of them. The trollers harried them from the moment they showed in the gulf, because the coho will strike at a glittering spoon anywhere in salt water. But the net boats take them in hundreds at one drift, and the purse seiners gather thousands at a time in a single sweep of the great baglike seine.

When September days brought the coho in full force along with cooler nights and a great burst of rain that drowned the forest fires and cleared away the enshrouding smoke, leaving only the pleasant haze of autumn, the Folly Bay purse-seine boats went out to work. The trolling fleet scattered from Squitty Island. Some steamed north to the troubled waters of Salmon River and Blackfish Sound, some to the Redondas where spring salmon could be taken. Many put by their trolling gear and hung their gill nets. A few gas boats and a few rowboat men held to the island depending upon stray schools and the spring salmon that haunted certain reefs and points and beds of kelp. But the main fleet was scattered over two hundred miles of sea.

For weeks MacRae in the *Blackbird* and Vin Ferrara in her sister ship flitted here and there. The purse seiners hunted the schooling salmon, the cohos and humps. The gill netters hung on the seiner's heels, because where the purse seine could get a haul so could they. And the carriers and buyers sought the fishermen wherever they went, to buy and carry away their catch.

Folly Bay suffered bad luck from the beginning. Gower had four purse-seine boats in commission. Within a week one broke a crankshaft in half a gale off Sangster Island. The wind put her ashore under the nose of the sandstone Elephant and the seas de-

stroyed her. Fire gutted a second not long after; so that she was laid up for weeks of repair. That left him but two efficient craft. One operated on his concessions along the mainland shore. The other worked the stream mouths on Vancouver Island, straight across from Folly Bay.

Still, Gower's cannery was getting salmon. In those bays no other purse seiner could shoot his gear. Folly Bay held them under exclusive license. Gill nets could be drifted there, but the purse seiner was king.

A gill net goes out over a boat's stern. When it is strung it stands in the sea like a tennis net across a court, a web nine hundred feet long, twenty feet deep, its upper edge held afloat by corks, its lower sunk by lead weights spaced close together. The outer end is buoyed to a float which carries a flag and a lantern; the inner is fast to the bitts of the launch. Thus set, and set in the evening since salmon can only be taken by the gills in the dark, fisherman, launch, and net drift with the changing tides till dawn. Then he hauls. He may have ten salmon or a hundred or treble that. He may have none, and the web be torn by sharks or fouled, heavy, with worthless dogfish.

The purse seiner works in daylight, off a powerfully engined sixty-foot, thirty-ton craft. He pays the seine out over a roller on a revolving platform aft. His vessel moves slowly in a sweeping circle as the net goes out—a circle perhaps a thousand feet in diameter. When the circle is complete the two ends of the net meet at the seiner's stern. A power winch hauls on ropes. The net closes. Nothing escapes. It draws together until it is a bag, a "purse" drawn up under the vessel's counter, full of glistening fish.

The salmon is a surface fish, his average depth seldom below four fathoms. He breaks water when he feeds, when he plays, when he runs in schools. The purse seiner watches the signs. When the salmon rise in numbers he makes a set. To shoot the gear and purse is a matter of minutes. A thousand salmon at a haul is nothing. Three thousand is common. Five thousand is far below the record. Purse seines have been burst by the dead weight of fish against the pull of the winch.

The purse seine is a deadly trap for schooling salmon. And because the salmon schools in mass formation, crowding nose to tail and side to side, in the entrance to a fresh-water stream, the fisheries department, having granted a monopoly of seining rights to a packer, has also benevolently decreed that no purse seine nor other net shall operate within a given distance of a stream mouth—that the salmon, having won to fresh water shall go free and his kind be saved from utter extinction.

These regulations are not drawn for sentimental reasons, but to preserve the salmon industry. The farmer saves wheat for his next year's seeding, instead of selling the last bushel to the millers. No man willfully kills the goose that lays him golden eggs. But the salmon hunter, eagerly pursuing the nimble dollar, sometimes grows rapacious in the chase and breaks laws of his own devising—if a big haul promises and no fisheries inspector is by to restrain him. The cannery purse seiners are the most frequent offenders. They can make their haul quickly in forbidden waters and get away. Folly Bay, shrewdly paying its seine crews a bonus per fish on top of wages, had always been notorious for crowding the law.

Solomon River takes its rise in the mountainous backbone of Vancouver Island. It is a wide, placid stream on its lower reaches, flowing through low, timbered regions, emptying into the gulf in a half moon bay called the Jew's Mouth, which is a perfect shelter from the gulf storms and the only such shelter in thirty miles of bowldery shore line. The beach runs northwest and southeast, bleak and open, undented. In all that stretch there is no point from behind which a fisheries patrol launch could steal unexpectedly into the Jew's Mouth.

Upon a certain afternoon the *Blackbird* lay therein. At her stern, fast by light lines to her after bitts clung half a dozen fish boats, blue wisps of smoke drifting from the galley stovepipes, the fishermen variously occupied. The *Blackbird's* hold was empty except for ice. She was waiting for fish, and the *Bluebird* was due on the same errand the following day.

Nearer shore another cluster of gill netters was anchored, a Jap or two, and a Siwash Indian with his hull painted a gaudy blue. And in the middle of the Jew's Mouth, which was a scant six hundred yards across at its widest, the *Folly Bay No. 5* swung on her anchor chain. A tubby cannery tender lay alongside. The crews were busy with picaroons forking salmon out of the seiner into the tender's hold. The flip-flop of the fish

sounded distinctly in that quiet place. Their silver bodies flashed in the sun as they were thrown across the decks.

When the tender drew clear and passed out of the bay she rode deep with the weight of salmon aboard. Without the Jew's Mouth, around the *Blackbird* and the fish boats and the No. 5, the salmon were thrashing water. *Klop.* A flash of silver. Bubbles. A series of concentric rings that ran away in ripples, till they merged into other widening rings. They were everywhere. The river was full of them. The bay was alive with them.

A boat put off from the seiner. The man rowed out of the Jew's Mouth and stopped, resting on his oars. He remained there, in approximately the same position. A sentry.

The No. 5 heaved anchor, the chain clanking and chattering in a hawse-pipe. Her exhaust spat smoky, gaseous fumes. A bell clanged. She moved slowly ahead, toward the river's mouth, a hundred yards to one side of it. Then the brown web of the seine began to spin out over the stern. She crossed the mouth of the Solomon, holding as close in as her draft permitted, kept on straight till her seine was paid out to the end. Then she stopped, lying still in dead water with her engine idling.

It was the equivalent of piracy on the high seas. The law says that to be taken in the act meant fines or imprisonment and confiscation of boat and gear. But the No. 5 would not be caught. She had a guard posted. Cannery seiners were never caught. When they were they got off with a warning and a reprimand. Only gill netters, the small fry of the salmon industry, ever paid the utmost penalty for raids like that, so the fishermen said with a cynical twist of their lips.

"Look at 'em," one said to MacRae. "They make laws, and break 'em themselves. They been doin' that every day for a week. If one of us set a piece of net in the river and took three hundred salmon the canners would holler their heads off. There'd be a patrol boat on our heels all the time if they thought we'd take a chance."

"Well, I'm about ready to take a chance," another man growled. "They clear the bay in daylight and all we get is their leavings at night."

The No. 5 pursed her seine, and hauled out until she was abreast of the *Blackbird.* She drew close up to her massive hull a great heap of salmon, struggling, twisting, squirming within the net. The loading began. Her men laughed and shouted as they worked. The gill-net fishermen watched silently, scowling. It was like taking bread out of their mouths. It was like an honest man restrained by a policeman's club from taking food when he is hungry, and seeing a thief fill his pockets and walk off unmolested.

"Four thousand salmon that shot," Dave Mullen said, the same Mullen who had talked to MacRae in Squitty one night. "Say, why should we stand for that? We can get salmon that way, too."

He spoke directly to MacRae.

"What's sauce for the goose ought to be sauce for the gander," MacRae replied. "I'll take the fish if you get them."

"You aren't afraid of getting in wrong yourself?" they asked him.

MacRae shook his head. He did not lean to lawlessness. But the cannery men had framed this law. They cried loudly and continually for its strict enforcement. And they violated it flagrantly themselves, or winked at its violation when that meant an added number of cases to their pack. Not alone in the Jew's Mouth. All along the B. C. coast the purse seiners forgot the law when the salmon swarmed in a stream mouth and they could make a killing. Only canneries could hold a purse-seine license. If the big men would not honor their own law, why should the lesser? So MacRae felt, and said.

The men in the half dozen boats about his stern had dealt all season with MacRae. MacRae knew they were angry, that they had reached the point of fighting fire with fire.

Under cover of the night the fishermen took pattern from the seiner's example. A gill net is nine hundred feet long, approximately twenty feet deep. They stripped the cork floats off one and hung it to the lead line of another. Thus with a web forty foot deep they went stealthily up to the mouth of the Solomon. With a four-oared skiff manning each end of the nine-hundred-foot length they swept their net around the Jew's Mouth, closed it like a purse seine, and hauled it out into the shallows of a small beach. They stood in the shallow water with sea boots on and forked the salmon into their rowboats and laid the rowboats alongside the *Blackbird* to deliver. All in

the dark without a lantern flicker, with muffled oarlocks and hushed voices. Three times they swept the bay.

MacRae battened his hatch covers, started his engine, heaved up the hook, and hauled out of the bay. In the gulf the obscuring clouds parted to lay a shaft of silver on smooth windless sea. The *Blackbird* wallowed down the moon trail. MacRae stood at the steering wheel. Beside him Steve Ferrara leaned on the low cabin.

"She's getting day," Steve said after a long silence. He chuckled. "Some raid. If they can keep that lick up those boys will all have new boats for next season. You'll break old Gower, if you keep on, Jack."

The *Blackbird* came pitching and diving into a heavy southeast swell up along the western side of Squitty at ten o'clock in the black of an early October night. There was a storm brewing, a wicked one reckoned by the headlong drop of the aneroid. MacRae had a hundred or so salmon aboard for all his Squitty round and he had yet to pick up those on the boats in the cove. He cocked his eye at a cloud-wrack streaking above, driving before a wind which had not yet dropped to the level of the gulf, and he said to himself that it would be wise to stay in the cove that night. A southeast gale, a beam sea, and the tiny opening of the Jew's Mouth was a bad combination to face in a black night. He passed Cradle Bay at last, almost under the steep cliffs, holding in to round Poor Man's Rock and lay a compass course to the mouth of Squitty Cove.

And as he put his wheel over and swept around the Rock and came clear of Point Old a shadowy thing topped by three lights in a red and green and white triangle seemed to leap at him out of the darkness. The lights showed and under the lights white water was hissing. MacRae threw his weight on the wheel. He shouted to Steve Ferrara, lying on his bunk in the little cabin aft.

He knew the boat instantly—the *Arrow*, shooting through the night at twenty miles an hour, scurrying to helter under the full thrust of her tremendous power. For an appreciable instant her high bows loomed over him, while his hands twisted the wheel. But the *Blackbird* was heavy, sluggish on her helm. She swung a little, from square across the rushing *Arrow*, to a slight angle. Two seconds would have cleared him. By the rules of the road at sea the *Blackbird* had the right of way. If MacRae had held by the book this speeding mass of mahogany and brass and steel would have cut him in two amidships. As it was, her high bow, the stem shod with a cast-bronze cutwater edged like a knife, struck him on the port quarter, and sheared through guard, planking, cabin.

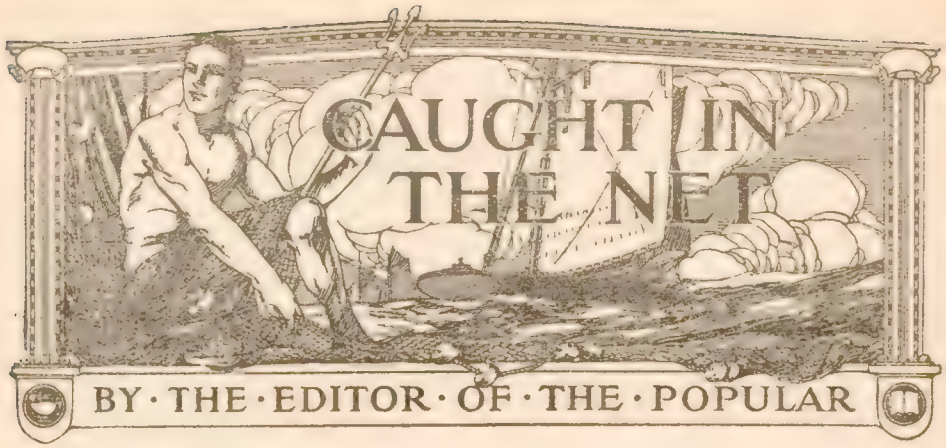
MacRae dived down the after companion. He went into water to his waist. His hands, groping blindly, laid hold of clothing, a limp body. He struggled back, up, gained the deck, dragging Steve after him. The *Blackbird* was deep by the holed stern now, awash to her after fish hatch. She rose slowly, like a log, on each swell. Only the buoyancy of her tanks and timbers kept her from the last plunge. There was a light skiff bottom up across her hatches by the steering wheel. MacRae moved warily toward that, holding to the bulwark with one hand, dragging Steve with the other, lest a sea sweep them both away.

He noticed, with his brain functioning unruffled, that the *Arrow* drove headlong into Cradle Bay. He could hear her exhaust roaring. He could still hear shouting. And he could see also that the wind and the tide and the roll of the swells carried the waterlogged hulk of the *Blackbird* in the opposite direction. She was past the Rock, but she was edging shoreward, in under the granite walls that ran between Point Old and the cove. He steadied himself, keeping his hold on Steve, and reached for the skiff. As his fingers touched it a comber flung itself up out of the black and shot two feet of foam and green water across the swamped hull. It picked up the light cedar skiff like a chip and cast it beyond his reach and beyond his sight. And as he clung to the cabin pipe rail, drenched with the cold sea, he heard that big roller burst against the shore very near at hand. He saw the white spray lift ghostly in the black.

MacRae held his hand over Steve's heart, over his mouth to feel if he breathed. Then he got Steve's body between his legs to hold him from slipping away, and bracing himself against the sodden lurch of the wreck, began to take off his clothes.

TO BE CONTINUED.

A great serial by Edgar Wallace, "The Daffodil Enigma," will begin in the next number.



LEND TO THE FARMERS

THE country needs production of foodstuffs. To get it the farms must be financed. There never was a time when there was a better opportunity to place savings in farm securities that will extend over a long period of years and carry a fair interest rate past the readjustment era.

Warning has recently come from the department of agriculture regarding the retardation of agricultural production through the inability of farmers to borrow on farm mortgages sufficient funds to maintain their operations. The farm-loan bank officials have conferred with congressional committees, urging the appropriation of several millions, but the business of the bank, established several years ago, has been halted by suits to test the constitutionality of the law creating it and its various branches.

This opens a tremendous field for a kind of investment that is even surer than Liberty Bonds. Farm loans will be worth one hundred cents on the dollar until maturity, be it five years or ten, and this fact is beginning to appeal to many investors. There is the added incentive to aid the farmers in the thought that increased production means a lessening of living costs. With an estimated amount of four billions in farm mortgages in existence, this means that about eight hundred millions in loans must be renewed every year, assuming that the average life of the loan is five years.

The lessened funds for such investments is partly due to the wildcat speculation that has eaten up millions that would otherwise have gone into sound investment. The farmers themselves are among those who have bought wildcat stocks with considerable freedom, for no class has been overlooked by the promoters of oil and other get-rich-quick stocks that have gushed forth in all parts of the country. Had all, or even a good share, of the funds thus accounted for gone into farm mortgages, the beneficiaries would be not only the investors and the farmers, but the general public as well. But there is yet a great deal of money awaiting investment, and the offerings of high-grade farm loans, say the financial experts, were never greater than now.

WRITING HISTORY IN ADVERTISEMENTS

WHEN the historian researches this age of ours—three hundred years from now, say—in order to build up a trustworthy picture of the past, he must find out what our wants were; for the wants of an age are the measure of its civilization. Voluminous but guarded state documents will have recorded what the statesmen thought we wanted. And the caustic critic of our "times and manners" will have left behind ample information of what, in his opinion, we should have wanted. But it will be the advertising sections of our magazines that will reveal to the future investigator what the great American public of the early twentieth century really wanted, and why.

These advertisements of a by-gone age will disclose our fondness for automobiles,

phonographs, table silver, and similar material possessions. But the researcher, as he turns tinted magazine pages showing jolly motor parties off for a spin, and gay young people dancing to a phonograph's tune, and nice families sitting down to table with that comfortable air of refinement that comes from dining with the "best" silver, will perceive that our desire for these things was due not so much to a crass materialism as to a wistful eagerness for adding grace and beauty to our everyday living.

Thus, cold creams and toilet soaps got themselves sold, he will note, not as lowly aids to sanitation, but as high ministers to romance. "A skin you love to touch," means to the reader far more than mere cleanliness. Even the ubiquitous cigarette smoldering in a background of Oriental splendor suggested to the imagination of its twentieth-century consumer that it offered something more than a plain smoke. It was a poor advertiser indeed that did not appeal to the imagination of his prospective customer.

This promise of lending charm to the acts of everyday life was, the researchers will observe, the most potent selling argument of our age. We may, as the critics point out, display a sorry indifference to the "fine arts;" but our advertisements will prove to posterity that we took a deep interest in that most vital of all arts—the art of daily living.

THE FIRST HUNDRED COMES HARDEST

WHILE it is generally conceded that medical and sanitary progress has somewhat increased the average of civilized man's hold on life, all our science and vaunted power of reason has yet to show us how to wrest the palm for longevity from the mere animal kingdom. The biblical three score and ten estimate still continues to be rather flattering to the "average" human's capacity for survival. Of a million mortals, of the civilized variety, about fifty per cent fail to reach the fifty-year mark. If we manage to become old enough to vote, statistics permit us to expect to attain to the ripe old age of sixty. One's chance of rounding out a century on earth is something like a fifteen-thousand-to-one shot, though more are said to be reaching the century mark than formerly. But there, or thereabouts, even the most tenacious of us have to call it a life. Far otherwise with certain untutored animals unable to know a doctor when they see one.

It somehow seems rather humiliating to have to admit that some of the famous giant tortoises of the Galapagos Islands, in the equatorial Pacific, are estimated, beyond doubt, to have first seen the light of day at least fifty years before our Revolutionary War began. Doubtless they consider the first hundred years as merely a sort of necessary apprenticeship to the real enjoyment of existence. The islands they inhabit, which belong to Ecuador, are named after themselves—the word galapago meaning tortoise, in spite of the suggestion of gallop in it. Another record holder for age is the pike, there being evidence of the attainment of two hundred years of age by one. A carp, well taken care of in a pond, is set down by the naturalist Buffon as capable of reaching the age of one hundred and fifty. Though one is not moved to be particularly envious of this latter, notwithstanding. After a good look at him one is likely to wonder, in the words applied to Caliban, if "as with age his body uglier grows, so his mind cankers."

In view of the fish's devotion to water, we would make a present of this fact to the prohibition party, if it were not for the fact that the Galapagian tortoises mentioned, apparently the oldest of all creatures, do not belong to the fish family at all, and cannot even swim. Among other animals who attain to man's approximate hundred-year limit of age are eagles and crows, and considerable, though unverified claims, are made in behalf of the elephant.

POLITICAL GENIUS AMONG WORKERS

IT has been said of American politicians and American labor leaders that they have no genius in politics or organization, and that they simply import ideas from British leaders of thought and action and apply them. Recently Canada has been showing us new evolutions on the field of political strategy, and has left us far behind in measures for the benefit of returned soldiers and in the handling of her railroad problems. But a group of workers in Cleveland has recently shown that originality in the management

of a big industrial plant—and originality that comprises political ability of no small character—can be claimed for Americans.

Principles of industrial democracy have been applied in a new way in a large stove-manufacturing establishment in that city, and so successfully applied that they have been adopted in two other plants owned by the same company, and yet other factories are planning to try the experiment. As a result of the new plan, employees have had a voice in the management for only four months, but in that time have developed as a constructive factor in operations, and have solved the most important problem that can come up in the relations of employer and employees. With the authority conferred upon it, the employees' congress, through its wage and rate committees, tackled the wage question, and in so doing attempted to provide a new wage scale that would be fair to both sides.

The wage scale, calling for a substantial increase in wages, was decided upon by the congress, and approved by the final authority, the cabinet, in the person of the plant's manager. The advanced scale has been placed in effect. Its adoption was preceded by debates in the congress, in the course of which the cost of living, the remuneration paid in similar factories in various parts of the country, and the price of materials that entered into the manufacture of every part of the product of the plant, were fully presented. All was done in an orderly, statesmanlike manner, with no threat of a strike or suggestion of violence.

Aside from special meetings, the congress meets regularly once a month after working hours. The right to vote for candidates for membership is held equally by male and female employees, but no one can vote who has not been employed for as long as three months. Members may be recalled after one-fourth of the working force have petitioned for the recall, and sixty per cent have cast ballots against their continuance in office. Employees are classified according to efficiency, eighty-four per cent of the workers having voted for that plan last December. The congress has twelve members, six elected by workers and six named by the manager, three of the employees' representatives conferring with the manager before his appointment of the company's members.

THE FARM BECKONS

TWO years ago we were feeding ourselves and a large part of Europe besides. To-day, with the incentive of war gone and the drift from country to city setting in more strongly than ever, we are in danger of a food shortage—a shortage that has already begun to be felt, and which promises to become more serious from month to month.

Many thousands of young men are daily in search of opportunity in our overcrowded cities, and for every chance to obtain material gain in cities there are now a dozen in the country. Agriculture, the oldest pursuit in the world, may soon become the master profession, for more and more do the farmers realize that they can force urban communities to give a larger and larger share of the fruits of their labor for the products of the soil which they must have to live. The building up of western Canada is an example of the superiority of agriculture to other kinds of labor in productiveness. Of the legions who rushed to the Klondike in 1897 to seek the riches they could not gain in cities, perhaps a few dozen made fortunes. Hordes of disappointed ones, returning to the United States through Canada, were attracted by the money made in wheat, and many of them stayed there and became richer than the lucky hunters of gold.

Almost every State now reports the need of men on farms, and inducements that should appeal to any farseeing man are offered to homesteaders and to intending purchasers of land. Read what the experts say of prices: "Assuming a free market, wheat may sell at five dollars a bushel. Estimates by the department of agriculture show a decline of twenty-three per cent in the acreage of winter wheat, and of thirty-four per cent in the prospective yield. Private estimates are that spring wheat will be twenty-five per cent less in yield. The corn acreage is also reduced."

In March of this year the farm workers were only seventy-two per cent of the total employed two years ago. In some States the falling off in labor supply was over fifty per cent. In the grain States they fear that the migratory labor, on which they depend for harvesting, will be insufficient for even the reduced acreage, and many farm laborers are

demanding full pay for eight hours' work. The farmer who, equipped with a fair supply of machinery, is willing to put in a full day's work, is sure to reap a golden harvest at prices higher even than in war times.

There are now about fifteen million farmers in the country, and on a ratio of almost one in three owns a passenger automobile, to say nothing of the other kinds of carriages. Many a farmhouse has telephones and electric lights and sanitary plumbing, and at least two Western ranchmen use aeroplanes to inspect their domains. Speculation in farm land and tenant farming in the Middle West have done much to discourage some agriculturists, but when one starts in by owning his land he is much more likely to succeed. Credit will probably be easier to obtain hereafter, for the plans formulated by the All-American Farmer-Labor Coöperative Conference in Chicago are regarded favorably by legislators. Banking and credit agencies similar to the Raiffeisen banks of Germany and some other European countries are planned. Nine American States so far have enacted credit-union laws.

POPULAR TOPICS

WATCH Japan. She is buying up thousands of cotton spindles in this country, she is cutting into our codfishing industry, she is even importing silver foxes from Canada to raise on a large scale.

BESIDES seizing upon ideas from other countries and applying them, the Japs are developing commercial genius of their own. They have now made profitable the manufacture of paper pulp from seaweed. The only company making this pulp is already building a second factory. It was organized in December, 1919, and is producing by a secret process fifty tons of pulp daily, used largely for cigarette paper. The paper sells at five cents a pound.

THE healthfulness of soft drinks as opposed to the alcoholic is now greater than formerly it was. Extensive use is being made in soda-fountain concoctions of lactic acids. The acid is formed by the benevolent bacteria present in Bulgarian sour-milk drinks made famous by Metchnikoff as a means of prolonging life.

THE current talk of oil being controlled by the British bears all the earmarks of propaganda, either to facilitate the promotion of British oil companies or to conceal the activity of the American oil interests. Americans control eighty-two per cent of the world's oil production, and indications point to the continuance of that control, as they are acquiring foreign fields as rapidly as the British.

INCREASING discouragement of betting on race tracks is encountered by American gamblers. It is just the opposite in France, where the government takes a percentage of the bets as taxes. Six hundred million francs were wagered at French tracks last year, and it is expected that one billion will be the total this year. Last year over ten million dollars went to the government as its share.

THE latest world census of automobiles shows that Canada, with eight million people, has 350,000, while Great Britain has only 257,000 for forty-five million people. Cuba has 22,000; Belgium, 12,000; Japan, 5,400. Greece has 1,000 and Tripoli seven hundred. There is one famous locality which has no automobiles and will permit none to be imported—Bermuda.

BUSINESS expansion has set in strongly in the United States, as shown by new incorporations. For the first three months of this year, new companies showed a total stock issue of four billion eight hundred and fifteen million dollars, more than three billions in excess of the same period last year, and more than two billions in excess of the total for the twelve months of 1918. These figures harmonize with department of labor statistics showing increases of thirty-seven to ninety-three per cent in eleven branches of manufacturing.

THE official organ of the Russian bolshevist government reports an estimated deficit for 1920 on the operation of nationalized industries of twenty-three billion seven hundred and fifty-six million rubles. The total includes five and a half billion rubles spent on official salaries and for the organization of industries, fourteen and a quarter billions lost owing to production cost exceeding sale prices, and one and a quarter billions spent on political measures necessary to keep workmen quiet.

THE most significant tendency in British industrialism is now the unification of trades. Already practically every British worker is in a union, and practically every British employer is in a trade association. More than fifty trades now have successful Whitley Councils—advisory conferences in which capitalists and labor leaders sit side by side.

PARIS will soon boast a vast building, if present plans are carried out, where five thousand of the world's leading manufacturers will display and sell to buyers from every nation. There is already such a building in New York, but it is not yet international except for the fact that Canadians as well as citizens of the United States are among its patrons.

THE bones of a prehistoric monster, of which one tooth weighed over sixteen pounds, has been dug up by workmen at Chaguy, near Lyons, France. Scientists declare that the bones, which weigh over four thousand pounds, indicate that the monster stood fourteen feet high and are those of a warm-climate elephant of an earlier period than the mammoth, which perished several thousand years ago.

THE radio telephone acquired new dignity recently when the house military affairs committee, in Washington, sat in session with headsets on, and heard the chief finance officer of the army, miles away, talk on the army-appropriation bill. This constituted the first official use of wireless by a legislative body in taking testimony. A peculiarity of the situation was that the congressmen, because of the one-way nature of the apparatus, were unable to interrupt or "talk back" to the witness.

ONLY the prompt passage of a Federal protective law will save the American eagle from extinction, according to a warning issued by the American Museum of Natural History. In Alaska hunters kill the bird for a bounty offered by the territorial government.

STANDARDIZED traveling stores recently seen on the streets of many communities in the Middle West represent one of the most promising of the many attempts being made to force down the price of foodstuffs. The big trucks are sold by a central corporation to operators throughout the country. Paying nothing for rent, heat, or light, these storekeepers can afford to sell at low prices. The stores are "wait-on-yourself" establishments, purchasers paying at the door on their way out.

Try, Try Again

By Roy W. Hinds

Author of "The Automatic Prisoner," "A Phantom of Flesh," Etc.

Rupert Atley was a gentleman crook, who had won for himself the appellation of "the Whaler" because of the big jobs he executed. Even when captured he was clever enough to win the credit for surrendering, but the detective in the case was not ready to call the incident closed

RUPERT ATLEY, otherwise known as "the Whaler," had a presentiment of disaster the moment he stepped inside the restaurant. It was a quiet eating house to which he often went for breakfast.

A light cane hung over his forearm. He was clad in a soft tweed suit, a rakish felt hat, spotless linen, and a cravat that left nothing to be desired in either the splendid luxury of its silk or the precise correctness of its knot and fold. There was about him the air of a man who just couldn't help dressing in the most becoming taste—nothing forced, nothing presumptuous, nothing indicative of painstaking effort; he was just naturally more or less of a fashion plate. His manner struck a happy point between indifferent leisure and preoccupied briskness; a man of means, no doubt, and yet a man of business. His appearance in the restaurant at mid-forenoon nearly every day bespoke for him a studious punctuality.

Tucked under Mr. Atley's arm was an early edition of an evening paper. The Whaler, so-called by men of his shady ilk because of the big jobs he pulled, sometimes read the morning papers—but usually this task was completed just before he retired. Reading the newspapers had come to be a task. In them he found accounts of his own doings, erroneous as to detail but often correct as to the main facts. Hardly a paper did he scan but held something of a peculiarly personal interest. Many times, particularly of late, he held the top of the page—his "story" embellished with an eight-column headline. This instilled into him a certain cautious wariness, a tinge of fright; but it also puffed his vanity. He was becoming aware of his own importance, though he constantly strove to hide his identity.

It was a bright spring morning. The sunlight and the soft air had filled him with content. The world seemed happy, indeed, smilingly friendly. He had an impulse to shower coins upon newsboys and beggars, but this was hardly in keeping with his policy of attracting little attention. He felt like singing, but that would hardly do either.

Now there was nothing gloomy about that restaurant. It was a quiet place, soothingly pleasant in its appointments. Sunlight found its way through the windows in broad beams. The whiteness of its tables was inviting. Mr. Atley was hungry. And yet the moment he stepped within he felt, vaguely, that danger impended. An irritating spear of alarm darted through his consciousness. A tremor coursed his spine. He felt that he was in a trap.

Rupert Atley's instincts were developed to a keen edge. His daily movements in great measure were prompted by subtle intuition. He had not always time to reason. He might have to take snap judgment at any moment. His whole life, his whole happiness, sometimes turned upon the developments of an instant. He lived, as it were, on springs. But he was a master in screening his emotions.

Of course, it was altogether improbable that he was entrapped. A swift glance over the interior of the restaurant assured him of this. There were but three patrons seated within. A man and a woman sat at a table together. Another man sat alone. None of them regarded Mr. Atley with anything but indifference.

The pretty cashier favored him with her accustomed smile—the smile of a girl who knew his face and not his name; a smile she invariably turned upon customers of more or less frequency. He nodded pleasantly and passed by to his accustomed table. In a moment he was seated.

Mr. Atley's brain had worked with agility in the short time that it took him to get to the table. If he were in a trap he could hardly retreat now. There was nothing to fear within the restaurant. If danger threatened it was from the outside. He couldn't get away without going through the doorway through which he had entered. If he tried to do that he would precipitate matters.

He sat quietly, well removed from the other patrons. The waiter took his order and departed. In a moment he returned with half a grapefruit. Mr. Atley's newspaper was propped against the water bottle. He alternated his attentions between the fruit and the headlines decorating the upper half of the exposed paper. He found that his "story" this day had been let down with a one-column head, though it yet had sufficient news value to retain a top position on the first page.

Within a few moments the accuracy of his instincts were borne out. A tall, slender man, somewhat youthful, entered the restaurant, gazed swiftly over the place and, his eye lighting upon Mr. Atley, walked leisurely to his table. The man was Jim Leeds. Leeds was a detective from headquarters. Mr. Atley knew him as such, although he had never spoken to him. He felt sure that Detective Leeds knew him, too.

"I knew it," Atley muttered inwardly.

Outwardly, however, he displayed not the least interest in the newcomer. Detective Leeds passed four empty tables and came straight to the place opposite Atley. He sat down with nothing in his manner except that of a man wishing breakfast. Atley glanced at him indifferently, but he knew in his heart that Detective Leeds knew exactly what he was about.

The waiter, who knew Atley as a regular customer, seemed a bit ill-natured because the newcomer had taken half the table. Apparently the men did not know each other. He thought it a trifle intrusive. However, there was nothing to do but attend to his new customer. The detective ordered toast and coffee, and the waiter departed.

Detective Leeds thereupon addressed himself to the man in front of him. "Good morning, Mr. Atley," said he.

The Whaler glanced up from his paper. He had finished the grapefruit and, with a hand that trembled not the slightest, pushed the plate holding the hull to one side. A faint patronizing smile crossed his serene features.

"I wish you good morning," he returned pleasantly, "but I'm afraid you have made a mistake. However, it is no matter—there is no reason why strangers shouldn't pass good wishes on such a fine morning."

Detective Leeds smiled, too. Atley saw that the man had a strong face. Inwardly he hated him—for his youth and his presumption.

"I don't think I've made a mistake," said Leeds quietly.

"At least," the Whaler rejoined, "you have made a mistake in names. Perhaps you and I have met before—I'm not so sure we haven't—but, in that case, you have made a slight mistake in names. You addressed me, I believe, as——"

"As Mr. Atley," the detective informed him. "Mr. Rupert Atley; the Whaler. Let's not argue any more about that."

Atley frowned. He hated the man more than ever now. Only a forlorn hope—ever so forlorn—possessed him. "I don't like your manner," he said curtly. "I——"

Leeds interrupted: "You're not gaining anything by arguing. I know who you are—and I'm going to take you down. Of course, if you *shouldn't* happen to be Rupert Atley, it will make no difference. You'll be turned loose. But there isn't any doubt in my mind as to who you are."

"You're going to take me down?" Atley repeated numbly.

"Yes—I'm going to take you down."

"Down where?"

"To headquarters."

The words dropped like a stone upon the heart of Atley. This was the end.

No use to argue with this young man. He knew his man. Atley was doomed. He had no hope, at least nothing but a fleeting hope, of besting the detective in physical combat. Undoubtedly the detective was armed. Atley was not. To a man who had faced before the imminent peril of long imprisonment the blow was harder than he expected. He never had been arrested before. He had had the fruits of crime without the penalties. The police had no pictures of him, though they had ways of identifying him if ever they got him.

They knew the man they sought, the man who turned so many fancy tricks in office robberies. They knew him for what he was,

though they had never put their finger upon him. The newspapers had goaded them into unwonted activity in pursuit of this genius. His victims, rich business men, had threatened dire political consequences if this man Atley ran at large much longer. The police would rather have him than a hundred others.

The waiter by this time had finished serving breakfast and withdrawn.

"I suppose," suggested Atley, "that you are going to carry this stupid blunder to a full conclusion?"

"I'm going to arrest you—if that's what you mean."

"Arrest me in what manner?"

"Well," admitted the detective, "I hadn't thought much about the manner. My main job is to get you down to headquarters."

"That, I suppose, means a spectacle. I shall be dragged through the streets with handcuffs on. I shall be exhibited to the curious throngs and perhaps be followed by a small army. My face will be seen by hundreds. And then, when I am released, as I surely will be, I will be pointed out perhaps as a criminal." He studied the detective thoughtfully. "Surely," he ventured, "you don't take me to be the Rupert Atley who has received so much publicity lately?"

"I know you are Rupert Atley," announced the detective positively. "I've been on your heels for a week."

The last hope of the jaunty criminal faded. But perhaps there yet was a chance for escape. Perhaps——

"And supposing I should admit," Atley resumed, "that I am the man you seek?"

"That won't do you any harm—it never does harm to tell the truth."

"How much do you know about this man Atley?"

"As much almost as yourself."

"And you know," he hinted softly, "that he is rich?"

"He ought to be. He's been pulling down big money—and it hasn't cost him anything for lawyer's fees. But his money won't do him any good now."

"Money is always a handy thing to have."

"Not in this case. The police know all about Atley. They have a clear case. He's done for once they get him in front of a jury. All the lawyers in the world and all the money in the world can't save him. I know that."

"Supposing we talk it over at least."

Leeds rejoined, bluntly: "We'll not talk it over on the basis of a bribe. I can't be bought. Save your money for the lawyers."

The Whaler mused. Then he proceeded with his breakfast. Leeds ate his toast and drank his coffee rather perfunctorily.

Strange, thought Atley, that he should have had a premonition of danger. He had had premonitions before—some that turned out to be correct and others that did not. Perhaps this time it was only a coincidence. Then he fell to studying the detective. He was quite a young man. This nettled his vanity. He dreaded to be captured by a youth.

"How did they come to put such a young detective after me?" he inquired, forcing an amiable smile.

"They didn't set me onto you. I went out on my own hook."

"Why?"

"Because I had an idea I could catch you." A smile of triumphant satisfaction flitted over the detective's face. "And," he added, "it isn't going to do me any harm at headquarters to bring you in."

"I suppose you will be promoted."

"Maybe."

"Providing, of course, that I am Rupert Atley."

"I'll take my chances on that."

"You say you have been following me for a week. What have you seen me do?"

"I'll have to report on that at headquarters first."

"I don't want you to handcuff me in this restaurant. These people know me. I want to come back with a straight face."

Leeds regarded him curiously. "I don't know as I have to handcuff you at all," he said. "I think I can take you down without that."

That is precisely what the Whaler wanted. He didn't know what he could do, but he felt that something might turn up on the way. Also he knew that detectives in the city do not handcuff prisoners unless they think it most necessary. Wise detectives have no desire to be known as such in street throngs. Chance passers-by may be crooks, and, seeing a detective, take particular pains to stamp his face upon their memories. A detective is as anxious to conceal his identity as a crook.

"That is considerate," said Atley, "and modifies somewhat your embarrassing mistake."

The two men got to their feet. Leeds, without being seen by others in the restaurant, passed his hands quickly over the pockets of his prisoner. He satisfied himself that the man was unarmed. They paid their individual checks—and the pretty cashier had no idea of the drama before her. They stepped outside. Arm in arm, chatting as the best of friends, the two men proceeded toward headquarters. It was less than half a mile—and the detective decided to walk.

"I'll shoot you if you make a bad move," he said, under his breath. "I'm determined to take you down—dead or alive."

"I think I'll get down there in good health," and Atley smiled.

Before the detective and the crook reached headquarters a cunning plan to cheat the detective of reward was born in the latter's brain. Money had been offered for his capture. Swift promotion would come to the detective who brought him in. Atley decided to cheat Detective Leeds of both the money and the promotion.

Naturally the detective fell in behind Atley when they had stepped inside police headquarters. Atley walked into the outer office of Police Chief McGregor, followed closely by his captor. The crook thereupon dropped his shoulders dejectedly and twisted his face into a woebegone expression. He walked straight to the desk. Detective Leeds, not at all suspicious, stood near by. In an instant, before the detective could speak, Atley announced:

"I'm Rupert Atley. I've come here to give myself up. I'm tired of being hunted. Here I am—lock me up."

In a few minutes the news had spread throughout the building, and reporters from all the newspapers flocked in.

The dispute that resulted between Detective Leeds and Atley provided rich for the newspapers. The press and the police department happened to be on the outs over this case. The papers seized upon the "surrender" of Atley as a fact. His story was taken at its face value.

He said that he had met the detective in a restaurant, recognized him as a detective, and, harassed into nervous exhaustion by the constant menace of the police, decided to give himself up. That morning he had planned to go to police headquarters, but it happened that the detective came into the restaurant and he beckoned him to his table. There he told him who he was. Detective Leeds, he said, apparently did not believe him but regarded him as some sort of crank. At any rate he induced the detective to accompany him to police headquarters.

Of course, Detective Leeds told the story just as it happened, but, having worked secretly on the case, he had nothing but his own word to back him up. Under ordinary circumstances his word was good—but the Atley case was an extraordinary case. The public, led in some measure by the newspapers, decided that Detective Leeds, on the way to headquarters with his voluntary prisoner had decided to claim a capture.

Detective Leeds was discredited in most places, but not with his superior, Inspector Fournier. He retained his place on the staff, but, of course, was cheated out of financial reward and promotion.

Atley's trick did not gain him one day of the period he was sentenced to do in the big prison. The judge put him away for the limit, twenty years, after conviction on a charge of burglary. But it did afford him satisfaction. Inwardly he gloated. Outwardly he sneered. During his trial he sneered openly at Detective Leeds. Not only had he cheated him out of reward and promotion but he had made him a laughingstock. He made the police department a laughingstock. Rupert Atley was in jail because he chose to surrender!

The public thought; read with glee the humorous gibes of the newspapers. Within a few days, however, the public forgot the case—and turned its attention to fresher topics.

Atley had been in prison about fourteen months. He was working in the shoe shop. One afternoon a visitor, a slender young man he had never seen before, managed to slip him a folded strip of paper and to whisper into his ear:

"Code is in fingures numbered from one to twenty-six, according to greatest usage. 'E' is number one."

Atley was thrilled. Here, at last, was the first ray of hope to penetrate the black gloom of that prison. He stole a glance at the man but feared to arouse the suspicion of the guard by the slightest demonstration. The visitor passed out of the shoe shop and, for the time being at least, out of the life of Rupert Atley.

That night Atley took his cellmate, a close-mouthed crook, into his confidence. They saw written on the strip of paper:

16-3 15-8-3-18 18-1-9-9 6-2-17-17 10-3 17-4-20-3 2-8-13 9-2-10-11-8-5-2-13 1-12-1-7-4-7-16 2-7-5 5-8-2-19 5-2-12-4-5 14-3-22-22-1-8-15-4-1-17-5 8-3-3-18 19-2-4-10-4-7-16 15-3-8 8-3-20-1-8-10 19-13-7-7 2-10 9-4-25-10-13 15-3-11-8 10-6-11-8-20-11-9-6 9-10-8-1-1-10 22-1-8-15-1-14-10-17-18 9-2-15-1 2-19-2-4-10 5-1-12-1-17-3-22-18-1-7-10-9 10-6-1-8-1

On the second night, by diligent labor, they translated the note thus:

Go from mess hall to library Saturday evening and draw David Copperfield. Room waiting for Robert Wynn at sixty-four Thurbush Street. Perfectly safe. Await developments there.

Rupert Atley, feeling sure that friends on the outside had taken this means to help him to liberty, followed the decoded instructions. He felt that the librarian, also a prisoner, was in the secret, but not by so much as a sign did he indicate this. The man gave him the volume of "David Copperfield."

In the cell that night two slender saw blades were abstracted from the thick covers of the book. How they came there was a mystery. A note in the book, also in the figured code, bade Mr. Atley to escape—but under no circumstances to take his cellmate with him. The man didn't want to go anyway. He had only three months more to serve, and thought more of liberty without pursuit than he did of losing good time off a five-year sentence.

Rupert Atley, in about two weeks, effected his escape. The interim was spent in obtaining by stealth clothes suitable for the outside. When he made the final dash he proceeded according to a careful plan—and he won. It wasn't long before he was safely hidden away in a furnished room at 64 Thurbush Street, in the city. At night he stole out to buy newspapers and food.

His escape had revived with a rush all the latent interest in his somewhat adventurous career. Too, the police were again goaded into a fury. Catch this notorious robber! the papers demanded. Atley chuckled. He felt secure. Whoever helped him out of prison would see to it that he remained out.

One afternoon Atley learned that his long-expected visitor had arrived. The landlady came to his room and said a man was below. Mr. Atley had grown somewhat impatient to hear from his friends.

"Bring him up," he said.

The visitor, following the directions of the landlady, came up. He stepped quickly into the room as soon as he came to the door.

Atley stared in amazement. Once more he had that terrible shock of being hurled, in a twinkling, from bright hope to abject despair.

"How did you—get—here?" he demanded huskily.

Leeds closed the door. He kept a sharp eye on every movement of the escaped convict. "I came on a street car," said the detective laconically. "Give me whatever weapons you have in this room."

Atley's manner softened and he sank, crushed, into a chair. He gazed upon the detective. "Leeds," said he, "I've changed my mind about you. When I first met you I took you for a boob who had stumbled onto something good. That's why I turned that fake surrender trick. I wanted to get back at you."

"Well," Leeds rejoined, "I guess this will put me back in favor again. The papers are wild about you now—just as wild as they were then; and I don't think there'll be any doubt about the capture when I take you down. There's a big reward for you, too. The old reward was never paid—and I think I've earned it. I've caught you twice. Maybe I won't be looked on as a boob down at headquarters now—and maybe that promotion will come."

"Yes, it will," the crook admitted. "You've done a good piece of detective work, and I'll have to give you credit. Why, I have hardly stirred from this place. I've been more careful than at any time in my life. How you ever got a clew to this place is beyond me. It's a good piece of work."

"Oh," the detective protested modestly, "it's nothing to go crazy about. It wasn't so hard."

"But how did you find me?"

"Nothing easier in the world. It was through me that you came to be here. I engineered that escape of yours. I couldn't hardly live with myself—so I thought I'd step out and get that reward—and promotion."

The crook stared. Leeds took a pair of handcuffs from his pocket. "And—I handled things in a way that can't be bungled this time. The whole world, except me and one or two friends who believe in me, think the escape was on the square—and they'll think the capture is on the square. Come, let's go!"

"Pursuit," a dramatic story of a double man hunt, by Hinds in the next number.

Maverick Basin

By Dane Coolidge

Author of "Fate and the Fighter," "The Wild Bunch," Etc.

(A Four-Part Story—Part IV)

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE EAGLES' NEST.

HALL had felt a strong hunch the moment he smashed in the sealed olla and found it a fountain of water; it had seemed an intervention, an interposition of that Providence which he believed had raised him from the dead. The hand which he could not see seemed to be leading him again, where before all had been darkness and doubt; to be smoothing out his way and solving the difficulties which before had seemed insuperable. And if it could give him water and a shelter for his beloved, then surely it could guide his footsteps and so order his goings and comings that he would succeed at last in his quest.

All that night as he rode on, with Allifair close behind, he was conscious of a hand that led him on; and at daylight, when he rode down to the crossing at Cold Spring, he did not hesitate to plunge into the flood. Their horses were weak and the creek was still high, but they fought their way through, anyhow, and led their mounts up the chasm without a slip or a fall. It was a miracle of good luck and, as they took shelter in the cave, the rain clouds lowered as if to cover them. The lightning began to play a weird devil's dance along the summit of the eastern ridge, the thunder smote their crags and called for rain; and as they stood in the court of their castle in the air, they saw their pursuers ride into the cañon below.

They were weary and bedraggled, but still leaning beside their saddlehorns to trace the line of horse tracks through the mud; a band of four horsemen, shrouded to the chin in sluicing slickers, but following grimly on their trail. Who they were they could not tell in the blinding rain; but as they gazed over their rampart they saw one essay the crossing and go down as if he had stepped into a well. The others shook out their ropes and rode to his rescue, dragging horse and man to the shore; and then in disgust they rode up to the low cliff dwellings and took shelter from the fury of the storm. Hall glanced down at Allifair who stood clutching his hand, and they turned back and entered their new home.

She had held out bravely but now she sank down, bereft of the last of her strength; and, after he had made a fire, Hall spread her bed beside it, for she was drenched and chilled to the bone. He boiled coffee over the fireplace and held a cupful to her lips and, after she had drunk, she opened her eyes and lay gazing at the strange, tomb-like dwelling. No light came in except through the low doorway, the fire cast strange shadows among the rafters; and yet somehow she felt a sweet contentment steal over her as she watched her lover by the fire. He was there, he would provide for her, and no one would ever find them—they were hidden away like twin eagles.

She fell into a deep sleep and, when she awoke, he was standing above her, smiling. Food was simmering on the fire, but there was rain on his hat and he had brought in the breath of outdoors.

"They are looking for us," he said, and smiled again. "But they'll never find us—here."

"No, not here," she answered, and sat up quickly, for he had laid a young turkey by the fire.

"Oh, did you shoot it?" she cried, and he stooped down and kissed her, then lifted her quickly to her feet.

"No, sweetheart," and he laughed. "I didn't dare to shoot, but I drove it into my trap. And while you were asleep I took our horses up the chasm and hid them in a little lost valley. Now all we have to do is to keep out of sight and let the chase go by."

He drew her closer to him and she leaned

against his breast, smiling softly as he told her of his love; and then they sat down to their first meal together while the storm swept by outside. Nothing mattered to them now, they were sheltered and warmed and fed and their dream had at last come true; and far into the night, though sleep made them nod, they sat up and talked of the past. Hall spoke of the time when he had seen her first, when he had crept to the Randolphs' very door; and how she had saved him from Ewing and Cal when a word would have meant his death. And from there they drifted on through the maze of their wanderings; since she, like a culprit, had been sent to Arizona and he had followed on her trail. It was a tale of true love, in which neither had ever wavered; until now in the chamber of some ancient cliff dweller they sat nodding by their fire.

They slept then at last and in the morning the bright sunshine shot a shaft of golden light through the door. All the great world without was awake and on the move, but nature had demanded its toll—and when Hall awoke their broad cave was in the shadow and the sun had passed over the crags. He stepped softly to the rampart and looked down into the cañon, where the creek was still roaring in flood; and up and down its course, for he could view it for miles, he saw the trailers, out looking for signs. There was a fire in the fireplace when he came back from his watch, but after they had eaten he covered it with ashes lest the odor of the smoke betray them. They settled down in the broad court, watching their pursuers from the protecting darkness and talking tranquilly as the search went on; and when evening came on they leaned over the low wall and gazed down at the camp by Cold Spring.

More men had come in, until now there were ten of them, and the flame of their camp fire illuminated the windows of the lower cliff dwelling until they glowed like the portholes of a fort. Even their voices could be heard above the rush of the flood, which had subsided to a tumbling stream. But seeing their pursuers below only added to their contentment, and they found time to look up at the stars. It was a soft and balmy night and no lions were abroad to waken the echoes with their yells; all their world seemed at peace, and yet now there fell a silence in which each followed out his own thoughts. The past was not enough, nor yet the tranquil present; but each must quest on into the future.

"When these men have all gone," spoke up Allifair at last, "and my brothers have given up the search, shall we—I mean—well, what do you plan to do then?"

"What *is* there to do?" answered Hall, "except to work out our destiny? But how we can be married is more than I know—are you brave enough to stay here alone?"

"Alone!" she repeated with a catch in her voice; and then she reached for his hand. "No, Hall," she said, "we are too happy, you must not leave me. But I am brave enough to go with you—anywhere!"

"Ours is always the hardest way," he said at last. "Have you thought what is going to become of us? Every day that I stay here I eat up by so much the food that should be kept to feed you; and when that is gone can you live on turkeys and acorns, as I was compelled to for days?"

"I can do what you can do," she answered resolutely. "But why do you have to go? Why can't we stay here together until the search for us——"

"Because," he broke in gently, "we are living in the world—and you know what people will say."

"Yes, I know," she sighed, "but why can't we be married? Why can't we ride into Tonto as soon as they leave and be married and start back home?"

"Because the trails will be watched—and your brothers will kill me if they ever find us together."

"Not if we're married!" she protested, but he took her in his arms and his silence questioned even that.

"They are hard men," he said, "and they came out here to kill me—but behind it all is your aunt. She told you in my presence that she would rather shoot you down than see you married to a McIvor; and I believe, Allifair, she would do it. But here you will be safe, and when I have finished with Isham and——"

"Oh, Hall!" she reproached. "Can't you learn to forgive? Does all that I have suffered count for nothing? I read killing in your eyes, that day that Sharps was shot—but I'll never forgive you, if you do! You are determined to kill Isham, I know by your silence; but think what it means to me. He is my uncle, after all, because he married aunt Zoolah, and the McIvors have killed enough of my kin. But it isn't that alone—

I want you to stop killing, and the only time to stop is now!"

"God knows," began Hall, and then he paused and sighed. "I am weary of this killing," he said. "God only knows how sick of it I am, but a man must keep his respect. I would give my right hand if the circumstances could be different, but it's either he or I. I can forgive him for myself, but for what he has done to others—well, we won't talk about it, dear, any more."

"Yes, we will!" she answered back, "because I won't marry a murderer—and that's what you are, at heart. Not that I blame you for it, Hall, for I know how you were brought up—all I ask is that now you should stop. Is that too much to ask?"

"No; not too much at all," he replied at length, "provided your uncle will stop. I fled like a coward when I heard your brothers had come, because I would rather be killed than kill them; but I ask you, is it right that I should promise to spare Isham when he is hunting me everywhere like an animal? Who is paying those men who are camped down below us? I tell you they have chased me far enough."

His voice was tense with passion and he drew his hand away, but she reached out and caught it back.

"Hall, dear," she pleaded, "don't you know what I mean? I'm afraid that Isham will kill you."

He laughed softly as she kissed him and crept back into his arms, where she shuddered and laid her head on his breast.

"No," he said, "he will never kill me. I've got too much to live for, now."

CHAPTER XXIV.

NO TRAIL.

The chase, which had been flung far, swung back toward Deadman Cañon, where the trail of the fugitives had disappeared; and with the others came the Randolphs and Isham Scarborough, riding up the creek from Tonto. Apache trailers came drifting in, drawn like vultures by the crowd; and soon, under their guidance, the search party crossed the creek and came out on the bench below the castle. Hall and Allifair could hear their shouts as they found the marks of his first turkey trap, in the underbrush above the little spring; and then the chase led on to the cliff dwellings below them, where Hall had made camp the first time. But the signs were all old and they came back to the spring, where they could look up and see the lost castle. Every word that they said could be heard now perfectly, and Allifair trembled as she listened.

"Well, the house is there, ain't it?" argued Isham, trying to bully the Apache trailers. "How'd they git up to it? Well, *busca* the trail!"

"No! No tlail!" responded the Apaches, and that was the last heard of them, for the cowboys had taken sides on the matter. Some swore that the trail came down from the top, and that they could see a kind of bear track down the cleft; and the others were just as positive that it had ascended the cliff but had been lost by a cave-off of the rock.

"No! No tlail!" repeated the Apaches when the uproar had subsided and Isham Scarborough came back at them angrily.

"You're scairt, you black rascals!" he shouted. "Hey, Charley—you take me up that mountain? Well, there now—you see? These danged Injuns are buffaloed—they're afraid old man Baker will kill 'em!"

"No! No 'flaid!" grunted the Indians, but they would not go up the chasm, for no Apache ever set foot on Baker Mountain.

"Hey, I'll tell you!" hollered Isham, his voice rising above the babel like the roar of a mountain bull, "I'll tell you where they've gone! Up Devil's Chasm and plumb over the summit—they couldn't get nowheres else! Didn't we trail 'em to the crick, and ain't we rode clean to Tonto, cutting circles to pick up their tracks? Well, they crossed then, I'm telling ye, even if you fellers couldn't, and by this time they're clean over to Geronimo!"

"Well, let's go to Geronimo, then," spoke up Cal Randolph's even voice. "What's the use of trying to climb this mountain?"

"They may be hid up there," cried Isham. "But cripes, boys, we know one thing—they never went down that crick. And if they didn't go there where else could they go, except——"

He paused as a voice began shouting his name, and Hall peeped over the rampart. A man had ridden down to their camp across the creek and was waving his hat and hallooing.

"What d'ye want?" demanded Isham walking to the edge of the bench and looking across at the runner; "what's the matter with you, anyhow?"

"Your wife says to come home!" shouted the messenger. "They's been a big raid—all your horses are run off! And three of the boys was found hung!"

"Hung!" echoed Isham, and every man in the party jumped up and ran to the rim.

"What's that?" they clamored, and Hall and Allifair rose up to catch the startling news.

"W'y, they was night riders," explained the runner. "They wore masks and dressed like Injuns! Yes, come in at night and caught three boys standing guard! We found them hung to a tree! And they run off all your horses!"

"Hell's fire!" exclaimed Isham, and stood staring across the cañon while his men gathered in groups.

"That was that sheepman, Grimes," whispered Hall to Allifair. "He's organized all those Mormons above the Rim."

"Oh, will he come down here?" asked Allifair aghast. "Because Ewing and Cal——"

"Maybe they'll leave, now," suggested Hall, and they listened again, for Isham was beginning to shout.

"Which way'd they go?" he inquired and when the man answered north he burst into a fit of cursing.

"It's them dad-burned Mormon ranchers!" he exclaimed, and started back for his horse.

"Well, let's go, boys," he said, when they had gathered by the spring; "we can tend to McIvor afterward. But if any one wants to stay here I'll give one thousand dollars to the man that brings me his hair. He's the dirty, dog-goned rascal that stirred up all this ruckus, but I can't stop to monkey with him now. Come on, Cal; ain't you coming with me?"

"No!" answered Cal's voice, and then, after a silence: "We didn't come out here to help you steal horses."

"Oh, you didn't, eh?" railed Isham, his voice tense with excitement, "well, since when have you got to be so good? Jest the minute they's any trouble——"

"We come out here to get our sister!" broke in Ewing's high voice. "And we're going to hunt till we find her."

"Well, hunt and be damned to ye!" burst out Isham in a fury, and went spurring off down the trail. His cowboys followed after him, talking low among themselves, and Hall and Allifair crouched down and listened.

"Well?" spoke up the voice which they recognized as Cal's; but Ewing did not reply. "Let's ask these Indians; maybe they know of some trail. Hey!" he called. "Come over here!"

"What you want?" demanded the Indian in arrogant tones, and Cal asked about the trail up the chasm. "No good!" replied the Apache. "Go hup—steep! Go hup mo'—mo' steep! Bimby too steep—fall down. Me no likum. Go home."

"Where you think this man go?" spoke up Ewing. "You find him, we give you two hundred dollars."

There was a guttural conversation in Apache then and Allifair began to cry softly, but Hall was listening over the wall. If the Apaches took up his trail they would undoubtedly find his horses; and his turkey traps and saddles, too. They might even find the entrance to their cave, with results which he did not care to contemplate; for he could not kill the Randolphs, and they were sworn to kill him—but fate turned the shaft away. The Indians were afraid of old man Baker and his mountain, and they revised their opinions to suit.

"Go on—down watah," answered the spokesman at last. "Fall in—maybeso both dlown. How much you give—findum body?"

"Nothing!" burst out Cal; "go on away, you dirty devil. By God, Ewing; I believe he's right."

"Well, I told ye!" accused Ewing, his voice high and complaining; "I told you we hadn't ought to come! But you had to have your way, and now who's going to face dad and——"

"Aw, hush up!" returned Cal impatiently.

"You—give—coffee?" asked the Indian with painful distinctness, and Cal flew into a fury.

"No—damn ye!" he cursed. "Git away, before I kill ye. Come on, Ewing; let's quit and go home."

There was a silence then, broken by sonorous Apache as the Indians talked on gravely among themselves; and finally, across the creek, Hall saw the Texans riding north and the Randolphs heading for Tonto. Then he stooped and gathered up Allifair, who had given herself over to weeping, and carried her into the house.

"I can't help it!" she sobbed, "they're all so rough and brutal; and they curse and—oh, I just hate them! And to think of Cal and Ewing offering two hundred dollars——"

"And they'd have found us, too," nodded Hall. "But God looks after His own. When I came here to look for you I was sure of my mission. But afterward, when I was hiding like a rabbit among the rocks and the Scarboroughs were prospering so wonderfully—well, I couldn't believe it. But hatred raises up hatred until it destroys itself; and now this sheepman, Grimes, whose herders they killed, has descended like a destroying angel upon them. It will all work out now, and when I come back——"

"Are you going?" she asked suddenly sitting bolt upright. "Oh, Hall, I want you—here with me! I'll live on acorns, I'll do anything—won't you stay?"

"I'll be back soon," he said, and turned away.

CHAPTER XXV.

LIVE BAIT.

There was a day of anxious waiting when they sat and watched the trails and then, in the twilight, Hall led Allifair up the chasm and showed her how to bait and set his traps. He helped her gather acorns, carried in a last load of wood and, late in the evening, they parted. She was brave again now, though she still hoped he would relent; but the traditions of a lifetime were behind his resolve and he left her without a tremor. Even his last kiss seemed cold, as if his mind had leaped ahead and was held by the grim task before him; and his voice, when he spoke, had the sternness of an ascetic who has banished all weakness from his life.

"I must go," he said, "and fight this out with Isham, and they will hunt me through the hills like a wild animal. And your part is to stay, like a wild animal, too, hidden away where no one can find you. But this is our last trial, and when I come back I hope it will be with honor."

He left her then suddenly, before she could answer, and glided away into the darkness; and Allifair clutched the pistol, which he had given her for her safety, and returned to the eagle's nest alone. She was like an eagle now that has lost its chosen mate, and its power to fly as well; and if he did not come back she would be more than lost, for the world would be empty without him.

Hall rode forth cautiously, scouting around above the Basin; until at last it came over him that the Scarboroughs had taken cover—they were shut up within the Rock House. Around the bunk house and corrals the Texas gunmen swarmed like flies; but they did not ride abroad, not even to the store—except when some one had called. Then they rode over in threes and fours, probably to get the latest news as it was retailed by the inquisitive storekeeper. After that he moved more freely, and on the fourth day he sighted Meshackatee, riding south at the head of a posse. But this was no posse of three or four fugitives, scouting anxiously around through the hills; it numbered ten fighting men, and they rode down by the main trail from the north. Winchester Bassett was still with him and Grimes, the sheepman; the others were strangers to Hall.

"Hello!" hailed Meshackatee, when Hall showed himself above them. "Come down and tell us what you know."

They halted on the trail, and after Hall had shaken hands Meshackatee drew him aside.

"Where you been?" he said. "Still gunning for Isham? Well, we've got him holed up like a fox. Grimes came down here last week with a bunch of Latter Day Saints; and we busted him, by grab, overnight. Or at least, Grimes did—I wasn't in on the deal—not officially. It was a dirty job, anyway—they hung that little kid that we caught up Horse Thief Cañon. No, not the one that cried—that nervy little devil that stood up and told us where to go to. He was too damned nervy—that's the trouble."

"And are you going back?" demanded Hall, "to repeat the performance? Because if you are——"

"Oh, no, no!" protested Meshackatee, "that was too durned raw for me. And, besides, I'm an officer of the law. This is a regularly appointed posse of deputy sheriffs, and we're going to serve a warrant on Isham."

"You'll never do it!" declared Hall, "I've been watching him for two days and he never goes away from the Rock House. And he's got twenty-two men, not counting himself and Elmo—that bunch could stand off an army."

"Yes, they could so," admitted Meshackatee, "they's no use denying it. But Grimes and his men are so crazy to git at him that Winchester and me have give up. They're going to storm that house, if it's the last act of their lives—unless we can tole Isham out! Say, there's an idee," he said, stopping to scratch his bearded chin, "I'll tell you how

I believe we can work it. We can let you go in first; and, unless I'm greatly mistaken, he'll take after you like a bat out of hell."

"No, he won't!" returned Hall. "I know him too well. And, besides, I've got a plan of my own. I don't want him to know I'm alive."

"No, but listen," insisted Meshackatee, "what do you care what he knows, as long as we git 'im between the eyes? We'll lay the ambush first and you lead him into it—we don't care, we'll take on the whole bunch of 'em!"

"Well," began Hall, and Meshackatee grabbed him by the shoulder.

"That's the talk!" he said. "Come on!"

"No, I don't agree to that," answered Hall shaking him off. "But I'll tell you what I might do."

"Well, go ahead!" cried Meshackatee, dragging him back to the posse. "Hey, boys, here's a man we can rely on. Go ahead, Hall, and tell us your scheme."

"I've noticed," explained Hall as the posse gathered about him, "that all the Scarborough men keep close to the house. They're afraid to go out into the hills. But every time some neutrals rides up to the store they go over there, sooner or later, to get the news. Now, if you gentlemen will conceal yourselves inside the foundation of that burned house——"

"Hooray!" cheered Meshackatee, giving him a slap on the back, "I told you he'd think up some scheme. And in the morning you can show up in the open."

"I'll do more than that," answered Hall, "I'll ride in from the south—alone. They'd be sure to scent a trap if they saw me there already; but if I came in just at dawn, and rode away with some provisions, I feel sure that some of them would follow. There's a thousand dollars' reward on my head."

"Aha!" cackled Grimes who had been wagging his head in approval, "so that's how bad they want ye!"

"Yes," nodded Hall, "but that's the very reason why we'll never lure Isham himself. He'll hold back and let his gunmen do the riding."

"Well, we'll see," asserted Grimes, "and if Isham don't come out we'll damned sure go in there and git him. D'ye remember what I told you when he killed my boss herder? Well, I've got three of his cowboys, already. And I ain't started, man, don't you never forgit that—nor these fellers here ain't started. Them Texans of his rode up to their ranches and took the work horses off their plows. D'ye think they'll stand for that? Not while there's a man above the Rim that can shoot!"

"Well, come on," broke in Meshackatee, "we'd better git out of here before some neutral comes by and tips our hand. And to make it look convincing, in case any one is watching, we'll turn around and ride back north."

He led the way up the cañon and they camped in a pocket where they could waylay every man that passed by; but the times were troublous and not a soul came or went, to add to the Mormons' grim toll. Hall kept away from the posse, talking gravely with Winchester who was now the last of the Bassetts; and that evening after dark they took the trail to Maverick Basin, surrounding the store an hour past midnight.

They found Johnson hiding in bed, trembling and begging for mercy, for he remembered the fate of the night guard; and long before dawn they had schooled him in the part which he must act in the grim play to come. When Hall rode up, Johnson was to step out and meet him and stand talking so the Scarboroughs could see them; and then he was to retreat and come out with provisions, which were to be tied on the back of Hall's saddle. That was all, except at the end Johnson was to give the watching Scarboroughs a signal—and if the signal did not work, if the Scarboroughs refrained from coming, then the storekeeper was to be hanged as a traitor. And the posse meant it, too, as Johnson soon divined; and, besides, he had seen the three cowboys.

Hall rode away north with the men who were to guard the horses, and as the false dawn appeared he took to the brush, coming out past the Bassett place at daylight. The hounds, as he had expected, suddenly rushed out at him baying; and as he spurred rapidly away they set up such a barking that the Scarborough dogs took up the cry. In the distance he could see them running out from the Rock House, and as the uproar continued the kitchen door swung open and a woman stepped boldly out. It was Miz Zoolah, and she would know him by his horse—the stage was set for the play.

He rode up to the store, without glancing at the stone foundation which sheltered Winchester Bassett and three Mormons, and Johnson came tottering out the door. His

face was ghastly white and his watery eyes were swimming; but Meshackatee from inside the door was coaching him like a prompter and he stumbled through his part.

"Why, howdy do, Mr. Hall," he fawned. "Git down, git down!" And Hall replied in kind. They held a short conversation, then Hall ordered his provisions and sat watching the Rock House while he waited. There was movement there now, and well he knew the glasses that were focused on his form; but he took the matter coolly, tying the provisions on behind, and motioned Johnson to go back to the store. Then he rode off to the north, leaving the leaven to do its work, yet half hoping that Isham would be spared. For when Isham met his fate Hall wanted to be present. But now he was only the bait of the trap—live bait, to lure the fox from his den.

From his hiding place inside the store Meshackatee watched through his glasses as the outlaws in the Rock House began to swarm; and when they went for their horses he relayed the news to Winchester, who was in command of the men behind the wall. Grimes remained in the store, to back up Meshackatee when he called upon the Scarboroughs to surrender; and four men were with the horses, which were hidden behind a hill out of sight from possible raiders. They had learned their parts well; not a man moved or spoke more than to give orders to the terror-stricken Johnson; and as he tottered wretchedly about, chopping wood and drawing water, they waited like cats by a hole.

An hour passed and Johnson came inside, for Meshackatee distrusted him still; and as the Scarboroughs milled about without making any start, Grimes took up a grim watch over the storekeeper. He had been seen to make his signals, which he claimed meant all was well; but the Scarboroughs, instead of coming, were gathered in a bunch, apparently engaged in hot argument. Perhaps the storekeeper was nervier than he looked; he might even have signaled them a warning, and in that case the posse would find themselves besieged and left in a perilous state. For the first thing that would happen would be the loss of their horses, and along with the horses four men; and to be set afoot in a strange and hostile country was disaster enough in itself. But if these things should happen Grimes already had the rope which was to hang the treacherous storekeeper.

There was a turmoil at the Rock House. Men mounted and stepped down again; and finally, after starting in a body for the store, all but two of the gunmen turned back. These came on at a gallop, spurring and swinging their quirts, and as they thundered up the trail Meshackatee focused his glasses and spoke through the doorway to Winchester.

"Here comes Elmo," he said, "and some other crazy fool. Kill the both of them if they go for their guns. But remember—we're deputies! And don't nobody shoot till I say: 'Surrender, in the name of the law!' "

He put up his glasses and turned to the storekeeper, who stood like a man in a dream.

"Step out, Mr. Johnson," he ordered coldly. "Can't you see them two customers coming?"

"But—but you're going to kill them!" protested Johnson in a frenzy.

"Git out there!" cursed Grimes, grabbing him roughly by the neck; "and you stand up to it, or I'll shoot you in the back!"

Johnson drew a great breath and stepped out the door just as the horsemen came galloping up. In the lead came Elmo, setting his horse up to make a show; but the man who was behind him reined his horse in more warily, glancing quickly about as he stopped. Meshackatee peeped out through a loophole, nodded his head at Grimes, and stepped to the side of the doorway.

"Who's in there?" demanded Elmo, hearing the quick stir of feet, and Meshackatee threw up his gun.

"Surrender!" he shouted, "in the name of the——"

Bang! went Grimes' rifle and Elmo lopped forward, shot dead by the heavy .45. The man behind made a grab for his carbine, then whirled his horse to flee; but before he could start there was a volley from the foundation and he pitched off, still clutching at his gun. The horse raced away, rearing, and kicking at the saddle gun, which hung flopping, half drawn from the scabbard; and this was the messenger of defeat for the Scarboroughs—another empty saddle coming home. They who lived by the sword had perished by the sword—the ambushers had run into an ambush. And in this last disaster Isham Scarborough read his doom. When the morning came again he was gone.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MAN TRAP.

The Scarborough gang disappeared overnight, disappeared and was lost track of completely, and its dissolution was as complete as that of a bubble which suddenly explodes and is gone. The outlaws and horse thieves who had so terrorized the country, carrying their trade as far as Wyoming and Texas, took to the hills and were gone, leaving the stock they had stolen to be rounded up and restored by Meshackatee. In the corrals by the Rock House horses and cattle awaited their owners; and the Rock House itself, once the holdout of the gang, became the abode of Tonto County deputies. But Isham himself, the wolf who had turned fox, was lost and could not be found.

He had started west, taking the trail to the Geronimo, and somewhere on the way he had disappeared. For hundreds of miles along the base of the Rim, and for thousands of square miles along its top, there was a forest of pines as unbroken as the first wilderness, as untracked as the Arctic regions. Once out of the trail a man was lost to all pursuit but, knowing his directions, he was free to ride on as he pleased until he came to the edge of the forest. Into this covert of trees and brush Isham had slipped like a weasel, leaving his wife to ride on to Geronimo; but McIvor cut his trail at last, and, after a month of hard riding, he, too, rode into Geronimo. For the wolf, now turned fox, had doubled on his tracks and taken shelter within the shadow of the law.

There had been a time when Isham had scoffed at the law, but that was in Tonto County. Geronimo County was different, and there was also a sharp rivalry between the mountain and valley counties. Geronimo was down in the valley, a land of heat and broad canals and alfalfa fields stretching away for miles, and its people were peaceably inclined; but the mountainous Tonto had achieved an unenviable reputation as the home of horse thieves and outlaws. The Geronimo papers had made the most of his outlawry but Isham had reckoned well when he depended upon local jealousy to protect him from the hand of the law. No Tonto County deputy could arrest him in Geronimo, and he knew that no Geronimo deputy would. And to add to his security it soon became evident that Tonto was glad to get rid of him. The county was bankrupt already from trying to convict him, and it was content to let sleeping dogs lie.

This much McIvor learned before he had been in town an hour—and then he experienced a shock. A tall man that he knew sauntered into the saloon and regarded him out of the tail of his eye—it was Burge Masters, one of the Scarborough gunmen. He took a drink and sauntered out, and as Hall sat at a card table another tall Texan walked in.

"Say," he said, coming over to where he sat, "haven't I seen you before around here somewhere?"

"Why, not that I know of," responded Hall, and looked him over carefully. He belonged to a breed that he knew all too well—heavy jawed, with high cheek bones and narrowed eyes—he was a gunman, straight from Texas. But what was he doing here in this peaceful farming community? The answer was in his eyes. He was there for a purpose and that purpose, for some reason, was not unconnected with him, Hall.

"That your horse out there?" inquired the Texan abruptly; "blue roan with a slit in one ear? Well, I'll have you to know you *stole* 'im!"

He struck the table and Hall glanced up at him quickly, but did not make a move.

"You are mistaken, my friend," he answered at last, and the Texan turned away. Hall stepped out the door after him, just in time to see three Texans making a critical examination of his roan. And then it flashed over him, the old Scarborough trick which Isham had attempted at Cold Spring. They were trying to prove him a horse thief. He stood and watched them, stamping their faces on his memory, and at last they slouched away. But he had the answer now—they were still Scarborough gunmen, and they knew he had come with a purpose. What that purpose was he would admit to no man; but they knew, and Isham would know. He was there to kill the last of the Scarboroughs.

Even if he were not superstitious the appearance of Hall McIvor would send the chill of fear over Isham; for the blue roan which he rode had lured Red to his death, and then horse and man had lured Elmo. It was like the shadow of a raven, the heavy winging of Death itself, to see that drooping roan at the horse rack, and as McIvor watched the street he was conscious of tense faces that seemed to divine his mission. Per-

haps it was his clothes, torn by riding through the brush, or the stern, set look in his eyes; but he could tell by their looks that these strangers knew all about him, although now they studiously ignored him. Even the Texans kept away from him, retreating to the saloon across the street; but he knew what was in their hearts. There was a thousand-dollar reward on his head.

Not for nothing had Burge Masters' friend slapped the table insultingly and accused him of being a horse thief; they were out for the reward and if he refused to fight there were other ways of embroiling him. Hall sensed mischief in the air, and yet he was puzzled—they seemed to be prepared for his coming. Where before there had been one Texan now there were eight or ten, all armed and watching him closely; and as he mounted his tired horse and rode him down to the corral he saw two of them swing up and start after him. Then he knew it—he had ridden into a trap. Isham had assembled his gunmen and made all things ready, and then let his presence be known; and McIvor, following blindly, had ridden into an ambush, right there in that peaceful, farming town. If he fled, they would follow him; and if he stayed—well, then it would be ten to one.

He rode down to the feed corral and looked it over closely, then summoned the proprietor from his office.

"Put this horse in a box stall," he directed, "and don't let any person go near him. I want to leave him saddled—and I'll hold you personally responsible if he isn't right here when I want him."

"All right, pardner," answered the livery-stable keeper, "I suppose the horse is yours?"

Hall took out the bill of sale which he had carefully preserved and showed it to the worldly-wise proprietor, who nodded and passed it back.

"Kee-reck," he remarked. "'Be sure you're right,' sez I, 'and then go ahead.' Your horse will be here when you call for him."

The Texans had disappeared when Hall returned to the main street but he sat with his back to the wall. It was a habit he had acquired in just such towns as this, when the clans had gathered for court day. But here all was different, the air was furnace hot and strange birds fluttered about through the palms; there was the smell of desert greasewood, the rank tang of arrow weed and the fragrance of sun-ripened hay. Heavy wagons dragged past, loaded with wheat for the flour mill which stood at the edge of the river bottom; long-haired Indians strode by, and Mexicans sat smoking on their heels. There were ranchers in sweaty shirts and faded-out overalls, and the usual collection of bums; but the Texans were gone, and as evening came on Hall retired to his room above the saloon.

Here was a new problem, new conditions, a conspiracy on foot to draw him into a quarrel; and he wondered rather wearily if it would not be better to withdraw and come in again. Isham Scarborough had rented a ranch several miles out of town and was reported to be harvesting his wheat; he was forewarned now, and if Hall rode to his ranch he would expose his hand to no purpose. And then the hired gunmen, who even now were dogging his footsteps, would find the opportunity they sought. He would be shot down from ambush, somewhere along the road, and Isham would escape unscathed. Every circumstance was against him, but now he could not flee, for they would hunt him down like a rabbit. All he could do was to stand pat and wait.

In towns like Geronimo there is but one place to wait, and Hall found himself back in the saloon. The Keno was the largest by far in the city, and there he would find company and friends. It was a protection, in a way, to mingle with the crowd that gathered to gamble and drink; and if the Texans came to gang him these men of the valley would see that he had fair play. So as the evening came on, making the darkened streets dangerous, he drifted back into the Keno; and to pass away the time he ventured small sums at roulette, always keeping one eye on the door. And then they came in, not eight or ten of them, but fifteen or twenty armed Texans; and a hush settled over the room.

The skitter of the roulette balls sounded with painful distinctness; and drunken men, wrangling in an uproar, heard their voices break through and rise high in the sudden silence. Texans were rare in Geronimo, they almost never came there, and especially in the heat of summer; and these swashbucklers from Tonto were known for what they were, though their purpose that night was still a mystery. All the Arizonans knew was that they were out to make trouble—Hall knew they had come to get him. They called

for the drinks and then scattered through the room, some watching the crap games, others losing a dollar at roulette, but gradually closing in. A hand, coming from nowhere, reached out to steal his pistol; another man jostled him from behind, but as the gang surged toward him Hall slipped between two tables and stood with his back to the wall.

There was a pause, in which crap dealers slid down softly beneath their tables and the rest of the assembly stood frozen, and then Hall spoke to the nearest of the gang.

"What can I do for you, my friend?" he asked with deceptive quietness, and the nerve of the Texan broke.

"Have a drink!" he guffawed, turning and heading for the bar; but Burge Masters stepped out in his place.

"We want you," he said, "and you might as well come quietly. If you don't——"

"I won't come," stated Hall.

There was another pause and the crowd by the door suddenly ducked and charged out into the street; then, after an interval, another crowd surged in, and in the lead strode Wahoo Meshackatee. He had a gun in each hand and when he saw the Texans he started, then glanced inquiringly at McIvor.

"Well, hello!" he exclaimed. "What's going on here, anyhow? Have I broke in on a little family party?"

Burge Masters turned his head, but he did not speak and his men began to shuffle away.

"Oh, nothing, much," he mumbled, and Meshackatee beckoned to Hall, then held up his hand to the barkeeper.

"Have a drink, boys," he said. "Your faces seem familiar. Long time since I've seen a live Texan."

They looked at him and winced, for they knew what he meant, and suddenly all the fight went out of them.

"Well," grumbled Masters, and they drank in stony silence then turned and filed out the door.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WINCHESTER TAKES THE LONG CHANCE.

"What you doing down here?" demanded Meshackatee of Hall as soon as he could draw him aside. "And what was that—a horse thieves' reunion?"

"Those are Scarborough gunmen," answered Hall behind his hand. "We're lucky to get off alive."

"*You're* lucky," corrected Meshackatee. "But say, have you seen Winchester? The rascal is down here, somewhere."

"Let's find him!" exclaimed Hall, and started for the door, but Meshackatee drew him back.

"Keep inside," he advised. "Them Teehannos will pot you if you show yourself in the door. Leave 'im alone—I ain't worried about Winchester."

"But this town is dangerous," protested McIvor. "We three ought to get together. I believe there's a reward—and a big one, too—on the head of every one of us."

"Come over here in the corner," beckoned Meshackatee, and they took seats at a table in the rear. "Now, listen," he said, "we stay here all night. You're dead right—the damned burg is dangerous. These officers in town, the city marshal and such, have crept plumb under the house. It's Texas day—or was. But here's the hell of it—I've got it straight enough they're jest waiting for one of us to leave. We're safe, here in town, but the minute we leave—well, I'm thinking about writing my will."

"I can't understand it," said McIvor at last, "and yet, in a way, I can. Miz Zoolah came ahead and hired all these gunmen, and then Isham broke cover and joined her. He's got a ranch out here somewhere——"

"That's where Winchester is," whispered Meshackatee. "They don't know he's come down. He's out looking over the ground."

"Just where is this ranch?" asked Hall after a pause, and when Meshackatee told him he fell silent. The night dragged on slowly and the games of chance closed. They watched and slept by turns; but as the morning drew near Hall rose quietly and slipped out by the back way to the corral. In the box stall he found his horse and led him off through the darkness. Something told him to go back, to turn and ride for the hills, to seek out Allifair and never come back; but something else urged him on, something that warned him to strike now, before his enemies could kill him by treachery. In the river bottom silt his horse's feet were muffled, he threaded the ghostly roadways in silence, and at the fourth crossroad south he turned to the west, taking shelter beneath the blackness of tall cottonwoods.

As the sun came up he crept to the edge of the wild land and searched the Scarborough ranch with his glasses; and already they were astir, loading some wheat sacks on a

hay wagon, rearranging them, making a trench down the middle. He lay watching them curiously, trying to divine their zealous interest in the loading of that grist for the mill; but when the horses were hitched up he was suddenly enlightened, for Isham climbed up on the load.

It was a traveling fort, a barricade on wheels; and as he settled down and took the reins they handed him up his guns and opened the gate to the road. Men that Hall had not seen now appeared from their ambush, hurrying to catch up their mounts and follow; and while they were saddling Isham drove out the gate and turned his team toward town.

Hall drew back from his lookout and ran to his horse, then hurried to a place by the road; but as the wagon came toward him he could see nothing but Isham's feet—he was concealed behind a wall of solid wheat. He hesitated, for there were loopholes between the piled-up sacks and Isham would have him at his mercy; and yet, if he allowed this chance to slip by—he crouched back, confused and distrait. But while he weighed the chances against him there was a stir across the road, a rush and a breaking of brush; and from the cover of the mesquite thicket a horseman burst out and went charging down on the wagon.

Isham rose to scramble back, but the horseman was upon him, firing twice, and never slackening his pace. Then, without a pause, the horseman reined back into the brush and went plunging away through the trees. Hall drew back trembling—it was Winchester Bassett, and who ever knew Winchester to miss?

At the shooting the heavy farm team shied and cramped the wheels, but now with reins dangling they went galloping up the road, spilling off grain sacks in their terrified flight. There was a yell from the ranch house, the patter of pursuing hoofbeats; and as the Texans dashed past, Hall ran for his horse and was lost in the thicket of mesquites.

Isham Scarborough was dead and Winchester had killed him, but there was still the law to be reckoned with. There would be a search for the murderer, a hue and cry marking down of tracks; and while Winchester had fired the shots it would go hard with Hall if he were caught near the scene of the crime. Winchester had counted his life as nothing, charging out like a whirlwind and winning by his very audacity; but now he would flee as swiftly as he had come, leaving nothing but his horse tracks by the road.

Hall spurred through the thickets and came out on a section line, but as he was about to take flight he paused. Back in the corner of the Keno, watched over only by his dog, the big-hearted Meshackatee was sleeping across the table, unsuspecting of the storm about to burst. In their rage at Isham's death the Texans might shoot him down, or have the officers take him in charge; and the devilish spite of Miz Zoolah was still to be reckoned with—she, too, might hire him killed for revenge.

Hall turned his horse toward town and went galloping up a side street just as the first Texans, riding alongside the wagon, came shouting the news up the street. There was a rush of curious people and the saloon was deserted when Hall burst in through the back door. Even the barkeepers were gone, and if Meshackatee had gone with them—Hall stepped to the swinging doors.

The wagon had stopped in the middle of the street, and the people were swarming around it; and up on the broad platform, now cleared of its wheat, Miz Zoolah was standing above Isham.

"He's dead!" she announced as men scrambled to lift the body. "Leave 'im alone, I tell ye; he's dead. But I know who killed him, and if there's an ounce of manhood in any of you, you'll ride till you ketch Hall McIvor. He's riding a blue roan and——"

Hall ducked through the door and made a run out the back way, but as he mounted he took a second thought. He had not killed Isham Scarborough, and it could not be proved—there was no one to stand witness against him; but if he fled for the hills and was pursued and brought back the fact would be used against him. And if the Texans led the posse, as they undoubtedly would, it would end in a fight to the death.

He reined his horse back and rode straight to the courthouse, where he gave himself up to the sheriff.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE HONOR OF THE M'IVORS.

Isham Scarborough was dead but the Scarborough gang still lived, and soon what had long been suspected was proved—Miz Zoolah had been its brains. Isham had put up the

bluff, the loud talk, and the rough work, but she had done the thinking which had directed his coarse violence along the ways of destruction and death. And, since she was its head, the gang still lived on, to carry out her will to the end. She it was who had laid the man trap at Geronimo, to net the last of her husband's enemies; and though Hall was in jail and so safe from open violence, even there he felt the breath of her hatred. She appeared at his cell door, to identify him positively before she swore out a warrant against him; and the look in her pale eyes was as baleful as a rattlesnake's when it raises its head to strike.

"That's the man," she said. "I'd swear to him anywhere. He's the man that killed my husband."

And before the justice of the peace, when he was arraigned for examination, she accused him with passionate hate.

"He's a McIvor!" she cried. "His father killed my brother and my elder sister's son! And now he's killed my husband—he shot him from ambush, but I reached him before he died. He had fallen from the wagon, and when I raised his head he whispered:

"'Hall killed me—Hall McIvor!' And then he fell back, dead!"

That was all her testimony, the only thing that held him and the one thing that could not be shaken; and he was bound over to the grand jury, which held him for trial at the pending session of court. But *had* Isham spoken these words before he died? In the dreary days that followed Hall debated it, pro and con; but he knew and she knew that, as long as she swore to it, it might as well be the fact.

Winchester Bassett could help most, if he happened to be so minded; but he had escaped to the hills, riding a relay of swift horses, and established a perfect alibi. On the very day of the killing he had been seen in Maverick Basin, a hundred and twenty miles away. So the whole matter stood, and Hall waited in silence until the day of his trial came at last.

A thousand times as he lay sweltering in the heat, breathing the dead, sickly air of his prison, he thought of Allifair, hidden away in their eagles' nest and watching the empty trail. How many times as the two long months dragged by must she have thought he was wounded or killed; and yet there was no one but Meshackatee that he would trust with a message, for Miz Zoolah was still on the watch. Somewhere, she knew, Hall had hidden away Allifair, and she had her spies even in the jail; and rather than expose her to the wrath of the Randolphs, Hall left Allifair to wait on alone. How she would live he could only guess, for her supplies would be exhausted; but he imagined her at dawn gathering grass seeds and piñon nuts or bringing back turkeys from her traps. He imagined her roasting acorns to grind them up for coffee and ranging like a quail to find berries, even gnawing the bark of trees or cooking mescal heads to break the dead monotony of her diet. Yet even that was better, he said in his heart, than to fall into the clutches of Miz Zoolah.

He went to his trial like a man in a dream, following the sheriff up the narrow, winding stairs; but when he entered the crowded courtroom, with its bank of auditors standing behind, he swept the sea of faces with keen eyes. Here were the men that were to try him, the men of Geronimo; for what they thought would be reflected by the jury which would be called to sit on his case. The jury would cast the ballot but the people would decide, for thought is as fluid as air. It passes from man to man, despite the menace of bailiffs and the charges of the court commanding silence; and the opinion of the majority finds its expression at last when the foreman says: "Guilty" or "Not guilty."

Hall pleaded "Not guilty," and he plead according to fact, for his hand was innocent of the crime; yet so intimate is the connection between what we think and what we are that somehow he felt himself the killer. He had come to Geronimo to kill Isham or be killed, he had ridden to his ranch to waylay him; and only the intervention of Winchester Bassett had kept him from accomplishing his purpose. Not that he held himself to blame, for the teachings of a lifetime made him consider such an act as praiseworthy; but the look in his eyes was that of a man-killer who seeks no excuse for his crime. And the men of Geronimo, being a hardy band of citzens, looked on in grim approval. According to their code he had committed no crime—he had fought a fair fight and won.

Being questioned he admitted that on the morning of the killing he had been present at the scene of the crime, he acknowledged connection with the Maverick Basin war, and his grudge against the deceased; but he denied most vigorously that he had fired the

shots that had resulted in the death of Isham. All this he did voluntarily, in the form of a statement, and then he sat down and waited.

There was a stir in the crowd and Mrs. Scarborough stepped forward, swathed in black to emphasize her widowhood; but when she began to talk she threw back the long veil and her eyes became set with hate. Question after question was asked and answered, the time and place were fully established; and then the district attorney asked the one, crucial question:

"And what did your husband say?"

"He said," she cried passionately: " 'Hall killed me—Hall McIvor!' "

And then she turned and looked at him.

"That is all," said the district attorney and rested his case, at which there was another stir in the crowd. Hall turned with the rest, and when he saw Meshackatee's huge head, his broad shoulders, and curling black beard; he smiled for the first time that day.

"I call that man for my witness," he said to the judge, but there was another surprise in store for him. Following close behind Meshackatee and concealed by his great bulk came Allifair Randolph, smiling.

He sprang up to meet her, but the bailiff snatched him back, the district attorney shouted out some protest; and then, still held apart, they gave greeting with their eyes while the crowd gaped. Here was the woman in the case, the woman we always look for, the one we are directed to find; and when she stepped into the witness box, her face radiant with love, the jury gazed about in wonder.

But when they saw the glare in the eyes of Mrs. Scarborough they read the whole story at a glance. This case that they were trying was not a plain killing, it was a battle between women as well; and when women are involved, as the jury knew full well, the facts are often thrown to the winds. Even the sanctity of the oath is lightly disregarded and passion pulls down reason from its throne; but now they leaned forward to listen with open mind, as the judge had so carefully instructed them.

Allifair, being questioned, explained the feud behind a feud—the Randolph-McIvor war and its relation to the battle which had ended in the death of Isham. Hall's lawyer repeated the questions as Hall whispered them into his ear, and, after she had told of the opposition to their marriage, the lawyer suddenly saw a way out.

"And do I understand," he asked, "that the complaining witness, Mrs. Scarborough, is a member of the Randolph clan? Well, please inform the jury if at any time, to your knowledge, she threatened the life of the defendant."

"Yes," answered Allifair. "One night he came to meet me and, while we were talking, my aunt crept up behind us and threatened to shoot him with a pistol. And when I interfered she said she would kill me before she would let me marry a McIvor."

"And do you consider that this prejudice, this clan feeling as a Randolph, would render it impossible for your aunt to give fair testimony where the life of the defendant was at stake?"

"I object!" spoke up the district attorney; but the judge overruled him and Allifair answered the question.

"I believe she would say anything, or do anything," she replied, "that would keep us from being married."

"That is all." The lawyer smiled and summoned Meshackatee; but before he took the stand Meshackatee whispered to the bailiff, who turned and looked sharply into the audience.

"Your honor," began Meshackatee, as the bailiff seemed to hesitate, "I have reason to believe that a band of armed men have come into court here to kill me. I refer particularly to that bunch of bad Texans."

He jerked his thumb in the direction of the front seats where the Scarborough gunmen, under the direction of Burge Masters, sat glaring with narrowed eyes.

"Search the gentlemen," ordered the judge, "and while you are about it, remove that pistol from the witness."

The bailiff rapped for silence and the judge went on sternly: "At the first sign of disturbance I will order the courtroom cleared. Any who wish may now leave the room."

The gunmen rose, drawing their coats over their pistols, and filed sullenly out of court.

"Thank you, judge." Meshackatee bowed, turning his belt over to the bailiff, and he stepped ponderously up into the witness chair.

"I am a deputy sheriff of Tonto County," he replied to the lawyer's first question. "Yes, I know the defendant well. He served as a deputy during the Maverick Basin

trouble, and is a gentleman of the highest integrity. Yes, I have often heard him say that he disapproved of all feuds, and especially of the Randolph-McIvor war. His sole object, so he informed me, in entering Maverick Basin was to rescue and marry Miss Randolph. She was being held, practically, as a prisoner, by Mrs. Scarborough."

Hall's lawyer was beginning to beam, the jury exchanged glances, and as Meshackatee went on to show Miz Zoolah's prejudice against McIvor, she rose and left the room. Allifair nodded to Hall and smiled, and even the judge began to unbend; but as he was making a ruling Hall sprang to his feet and pointed toward the door.

"Your honor!" he cried, "I want that woman restrained! I have reason to believe that ——"

"Sit down!" ordered the judge and, as Hall obeyed, Mrs. Scarborough came swiftly down the aisle. Her face was half concealed beneath the veil of heavy crape that hung from her widow's bonnet, but her right hand was hidden beneath the folds of a black shawl which she had thrown about her shoulders. And something about her step as she came down toward him warned Hall of the murder in her heart.

"This is not Kentucky," went on the judge severely, "nor is it Maverick Basin. You are safe in the custody of the court."

Hall rose again and glanced helplessly about, then dropped his hands by his side.

"Very well," he replied, and as Mrs. Scarborough swept by him he turned and met her eye. "I have never struck a woman yet," he said, and her thin lips parted in a sneer.

"No," she answered, and while they gazed at her fascinated she whipped out a pistol, full cocked. "I'll show you!" she cried, and, pressing it against his breast, she gave the trigger a jerk. But the gun only snapped; for her widow's veil, hanging down from her bonnet, had caught on the hammer and fouled it. She struggled to release it, to cock and fire again; and Hall turned his eyes on the judge.

"And I never will," he added, "not even to save my life."

"Seize that woman!" shouted the judge, suddenly roused from the paralysis which had frozen every man in his place; but the bailiff had come to life first. He struck the gun to one side and crushed Miz Zoolah's arms to her sides, and as she fought like a wild cat others rushed in to help him while the crowd stampeded through the doors.

"I'll git you!" she shrieked, her pale eyes blazing with rage as McIvor stood smiling before her—but his smile was not for her. Allifair had stood fast, and now she came running to throw herself into his arms.

"God has saved you!" she sobbed, and he bowed his head.

"Yes," he said. "Saved me for you."

They stood locked in each others arms, oblivious of the spectators, unconscious of what was going on; and when they looked about the clerk was piling up his books and the district attorney was speaking.

"If the court please," he said, "the conduct of the complaining witness has destroyed, in my opinion, the value of her testimony; and I therefore ask the court to direct an acquittal, since no jury would convict on such evidence."

As court was adjourned he came over and shook hands, wishing them all the happiness in life; and Hall and Allifair were still receiving congratulations when Meshackatee came hurrying back.

"Well, come on; come on!" he boomed, "we've got her locked up in jail. And I'll say right now she's half red ant and the other half stinging scorpion. So if you're going to git married you'd better do it quick, before she breaks down the bars. I'll give the bride away, if you'll excuse these clothes; but, by grab, if them scoundrels hadn't jinglebobbed my ears I'd've stole Miss Allifair myself. A prettier woman—or a braver woman, either—I never expect to see. She lived up in them cliff dwellings for nigh onto two months; and when I come by there—well, I'll go and git the license. There's the judge there, trying to flag you."

The judge, indeed, was beckoning them to his chambers, and when they had entered he gave Hall his hand while Allifair looked on, smiling.

"Mr. McIvor," he said, "I owe you an apology. And allow me to retract what I said about Kentucky, a State which may well be proud of you. Whatever she may lack in respect for the law, you have learned there a chivalry and a reverence for womankind which I never expected to witness. If you and Miss Randolph will do me the honor I shall be happy to officiate at your marriage."

Hall hesitated a moment and glanced down at Allifair, who blushed and nodded her head.

"We thank you, judge," he said, "and

since you have referred to Kentucky, let me say that our marriage will end the greatest feud that has ever existed in that State. The Randolphs and McIvors have fought for twenty years, and our code may seem different from yours; but despite our lawless acts we McIvors love truth and justice, and hold our honor above our lives."

"You have shown," declared the judge, "that that is no idle phrase—I can see that it comes from your heart. But why, if I may ask, did you refuse to strike that woman? Would you stand there and allow her to kill you?"

"No gentleman——" began Hall, and then he stopped and met Allifair's unbelieving gaze. "She was a Randolph," he said and bowed.

"Oh, Hall!" reproached Allifair suddenly clutching at his hand and then her eyes softened and she smiled.

"The Randolphs love honor, too," she said.

THE END.

PUNCHIN' DOUGH

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

COME all you young waddies, I'll sing you a song:
Stand back from the wagon—stay where you belong:
I've heard you observin' I'm fussy and slow,
While you're punchin' cattle and I'm punchin' dough.

Now I reckon your stomach would grow to your back,
If it wan't for the cook that keeps fillin' the slack:
With the beans in the box and the pork in the tub,
I'm a wonderin', now, who would fill you with grub?

You think you're right handy with gun and with rope,
But I've noticed you're bashful when usin' the soap:
When you're rollin' your Bull for your brown cigarette,
I been rollin' dough for the biscuits you et.

When you're cuttin' stock, then I'm cuttin' the steak:
When you're wranglin' hosses, I'm wranglin' a cake:
When you're hazin' the doggies and battin' your eyes,
I'm hazin' dried apples that aim to be pies.

You brag about shootin' up windows and lights,
But try shootin' biscuits for twelve appetites:
When you crawl from your roll and the ground it is froze,
Then who biles the coffee that thaws out your nose?

In the old days the punchers took just what they got:
It was sowbelly, beans, and the old coffeepot;
But now you come howlin' for pie and for cake,
Then you cuss at the cook for a good bellyache.

You say that I'm old with my feet on the skids;
Well, I'm tellin' you now that you're nothin' but kids:
If you reckon your mounts are some snaky and raw,
Just try ridin' herd on a stove that won't draw.

When you look at my apron, you're readin' my brand,
Four X, which is sign for the best in the land:
On bottle or sack it sure stands for good luck,
So, line up you waddies and wrangle your chuck.

No use of your snortin' and fightin' your head:
If you like it with chili, just eat what I said:
For I aim to be boss of this end of the show
While you're punchin' cattle and I'm punchin' dough.

An Ebony Finish

By Rothvin Wallace

Author of "Colored à la Mode," "Black Art," Etc.

Mr. Horatio Pinkwiddy plays both ends of a reform movement against each other this time, and with the aid of a Latin quotation, causes great ructions among the forces of reform and reaction.

LOVE for love's sake was a matter that concerned Mr. Horatio Pinkwiddy not at all; but as an adjunct to business enterprise, the grand traveling president of the Great International Association for the Protection of Freeborn Negro Americans was beginning to sense wherein coy Cupid might be enlisted as a powerful ally.

Mr. Pinkwiddy adjusted his lavender cravat, smoothed a recalcitrant eyebrow, flecked a speck of dust from the lapel of his immaculate cream-hued flannel coat, slanted the mirror of his bureau to an angle that would permit him to admire himself sitting down, then eased himself into a comfortable hotel chair, slightly the worse for wear. Thus carefully seated, Mr. Pinkwiddy protected his creases by gently pulling his trousers bottoms to the tops of his blue silk stockings, extracted a gold-tipped cigarette from an engraved silver case, scratched a match daintily on his enamel match box, blew a smoke ring at the ceiling—and proceeded to enjoy the reflection of his own self-satisfied, chocolate-colored smile.

"That's it," he beamed in approving soliloquy. "That's the very idea. We'll call it the Anti-Do-It League. And my, but won't that fat old black gal be pleased!"

In view of recent successes, in consequence of his adroit promotion of bond sales and memberships in the Great International Association for the Protection of Freeborn Negro Americans, Mr. Pinkwiddy had come dangerously near to stubbing his patent-leather-shod toe on the primrose path of dalliance. But he had checked his sybaritic proclivities well on the safe side of the brink of disaster, and now the calculating mind of the grand traveling president was functioning again in its normal manner.

"Mares sure make the money go," he murmured, with practical reversal of the old axiom; "that is," he added sapiently, "unless a man can capitalize the mares."

With regard to "mares," Mr. Pinkwiddy was making mental allusion to that solid widow lady of the town, Mrs. Prunella Peachblow, and her charming, taffy-tinted antithesis, Miss Jacqueline Rose.

"They're both mighty fond of me," mused Mr. Pinkwiddy assuredly. "Yes, they are—uh-huh! Ain't a buck nigger in town got a chance when I flash in."

In his present state of polished affluence, Mr. Pinkwiddy felt most at home. When occasion demanded, of course, he could, figuratively speaking, get down on the floor and play marbles with the Romans; but proletarian habits and customs struck no responsive chord in his preferably silk-shirted bosom. It pleased him most to pose as the "College-educated gentleman." Even the envy of rivals, who were wont to refer to him as "dat splendelegant niggah," was sweet music to his ears—provided the harmony of a silver jingle echoed from his pockets.

The grand traveling president burned up three elegant gold-tipped cigarettes while cogitating over the pros and cons of the Anti-Do-It League. His shining brow contracted in a way that registered some doubt when his mind dwelt on the glittering and effervescent Miss Jacqueline Rose; his double rows of polished ivories were revealed in a pleasant smile when his thoughts strayed to his potential conquest of the buxom Mrs. Prunella Peachblow. However, Mr. Pinkwiddy was a man of quick decision and rapid action. In that moment, he had determined to buy an automobile—forthwith, forthright, immediately, at once. That should be his opening wedge in the plot.

After drawing on his yellow silk gloves and taking his graceful bamboo walking stick in hand, Mr. Pinkwiddy sauntered nonchalantly and debonairly down to the

Elite Garage and Society Motor Sales Rooms, conducted by Mr. Achilles Hornblower. The fact that the main business accruing to Achilles was the sale of gasoline and repairs to white folks' cars did not at all disturb Achilles in flaunting his high-falutin' sign. He did, on occasions, sell a car; he stabled at least four for the colored gentry of the neighborhood, and he maintained a couple of flivvers for hack service. Also, he announced himself as "selling agent and disbursement manager" for the "Yellow Peril Six." In his present emergency, therefore, Mr. Pinkwiddy felt that Achilles might be of service.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Hornblower," he greeted elegantly, extending a silk-gloved hand for a genial shake.

Mr. Hornblower looked embarrassed, rubbed his grim hands against his overalled legs, and appeared altogether flabbergasted.

"Scusin' me ag'in de han'shake, Mistah Pinkwiddy," he apologized, "but ma fingahs is so duhty dey muss up yo' fine gloves."

"No matter," replied Mr. Pinkwiddy indifferently.

However, his bluff of extreme elegance had registered an impression, and he did not press the matter. Instead, he gracefully withdrew the threatened half of his two-dollar silks, extracted one of his gold-tipped cigarettes, and tamped the tobacco against the side of his silver case.

" 'Deed, now," exclaimed Achilles heartily, "I's pow'ful glad to see yo'. Whut mought de honah ob de occashum fo' which I hab de pleasuah ob this visit be, Mistah Pinkwiddy?"

"I's gwine buy me a autymobeel," replied Mr. Pinkwiddy, falling unconsciously into the vernacular of his race.

" 'Deed, now, is yo'?" beamed Achilles. "Dat sho' pow'ful fine. But scusin' me, Mistah Pinkwiddy, de law am done set agin' smokin' out heah in de garage; iffen yo' please to be obleeged to walk intah ma private office, where us kin talk confidential and——"

Mr. Hornblower completed his invitation with a sententious sweep of the hand, and threw open a door that was labeled "Privut."

"Not necessary," said Mr. Pinkwiddy, recklessy grinding his expensive, unsmoked cigarette beneath his high Cuban heel. "Us kin—we can talk uninterruptedly where we have the pleasure to stand at present, I venture to asseverate?"

"Yas, sah; yas, sah," agreed Achilles. Then he grinned appreciatively: "Yo' sho' does spill high-soundin' wohds, Mistah Pinkwiddy."

"Words is nothing," retorted Mr. Pinkwiddy scornfully. "Actions shout loud, even if you don't talk more than in a whisper. I am come to purchase a motor car. I like that yellow racer. How much?"

Mr. Pinkwiddy indicated his choice by pointing with his slender bamboo stick to a rakish machine that occupied a corner of the garage. He thought that he knew that car. Also, he had heard vague murmurs as to the financial condition of its owners, and, if these were true, he sure wanted that car, more than any other car in the world.

"I don't know bouten dat cah, Mistah Pinkwiddy," said Achilles dubiously. "Dat cah b'long to de Ebony bruddahs, whut keeps de Hersoot Pahlahs an' Bilyahd Institoot."

Which statement confirmed Horatio's suspicion. That Yellow Peril Six was the property of the swanking proprietors of the Hirsute Parlors and Billiard Institute, headquarters for shaves, haircuts, handbook makers, crap shooters, and pool sharks.

"Belongs to them—yet?" flashed Mr. Pinkwiddy.

"Well, sah, *me* an' dem," admitted Achilles reluctantly.

"How come?" demanded Horatio.

"Fu'st off," explained Achilles, "dey buy dat cah fo' fibe hond'ed dollahs down cash, makin' 'greements to pay fifty dollahs per each month fo' ten months, come de tenth day dereob. Aftah makin' payment propahlak fo' th'ee months, dey lapse de las', an' it 'peahs sorraful sad dis heah month, 'countin' dis am de 'lebenth day. In addishum theahto, dem Ebony boys is owin' sebenty-seben dollahs an' sebenty-seben centses fo' gas an' repairs. So, I jest ups an' tole dem bruddahs dey is got to make settlements befo' I's gwine ease de strain f'om dat cah by tyin' it loose f'om de garage."

"M-m-m!" pondered Mr. Pinkwiddy sapiently. "You did quite right, Mr. Hornblower. And now, I'm going to take that agreement over, and become the owner of that Yellow Peril Six."

"But de Ebony boys say dey sho' 'nuff gwine pay me to-morrah," protested Achilles.

"Too late," snapped Mr. Pinkwiddy.

"They busted their contract, and I've got my mind set on that Yellow Peril Six."

To state the situation briefly, David Ebony, who ran the barbering end of the business, was sweet on Mrs. Prunella Peachblow. His twin brother, Goliath, who conducted the pool room, had a crush on Miss Jacqueline Rose. Mr. Pinkwiddy had seen them riding in couples and quadruples, in that identical Yellow Peril Six. But now—now! Mr. Pinkwiddy gloated inwardly at his rare good fortune.

"H—h—how much yo' fixin' to pay me fo' it?" asked Mr. Hornblower weakly.

"Let's see." Mr. Pinkwiddy did a quick problem in mental arithmetic. "The Ebony boys owe you fifty dollars a month for seven months. That's three hundred and fifty dollars. I take over the agreement on that basis—and here's fifty dollars, first payment. Give me a receipt."

Mr. Pinkwiddy thrust several bills quickly into Mr. Hornblower's hand, before Mr. Hornblower could figure just where he stood in the transaction.

"B—b—but, Mistah Pinkwiddy," stammered Achilles, "dey's a bill ob sebenty-seben dollahs an' sebenty-seben centses agin' dat cah, an'—an' anyways, mebbe dem Ebony boys gwine come 'round to-morrah, lak dey say, an'——"

"That bill for repairs is no affair of mine," Mr. Pinkwiddy said positively. "I did not break the car. I did not burn the gas. The Ebony boys have busted their contract, legally and in toto, whereupon I hereupon agree to assume and execute it to the best of my honor and intent. And besides"—Mr. Pinkwiddy's tone became insinuating—"besides, you are seeking election as second assistant secretary of the local Exalted Conclave of the Great International Association for the Protection of Freeborn Negro Americans, of which I have the honor to be the grand traveling president. Perhaps I can help you. Give me a receipt."

"Yas, sah; yas, sah, Mistah Pinkwiddy," Achilles hastened to say.

Mr. Pinkwiddy walked to the white folks' public library, and asked the girl on the desk there where he might find a copy of the dictionary, the Holy Bible, and "also, ma'am," he said, "I'd like to find something about love—a book with those little verses and sayings of great men on the subject."

Concealing a smile with difficulty, the girl accommodated him, and Mr. Pinkwiddy, taking his morocco-bound notebook and silver pencil from an inner pocket, went to a table and became absorbed in an intensive occupation. He had heard that, by the Bible, one could prove anything; he had a faint recollection that, in the back of the dictionary, there was a section devoted to "Foreign words and phrases." He turned to the latter first, and became highly elated at what he found in the very first alphabetical arrangement.

"That 'ad usum, commonly abbreviated to ad us,' sounds kinda good," mused Mr. Pinkwiddy. "That means, the book says, 'according to custom,' But here is sure what I want—'Ad unguem factus homo,' which means, the book says, 'a man finished to his finger nail; a highly cultivated man; a perfect gentleman.' That sure is me."

After making careful notation in his morocco-bound book, Mr. Pinkwiddy turned to the Bible, and, because of his quick success with the dictionary, went to the back pages first. There, to his delight, he found the concordance, with its arranged lists of subjects for ready reference. In half an hour he had just what he wanted.

"I'll tell the world you've got a good little lib'ry here," he condescended to inform the girl on his way out.

Back to the Elite Garage, then, sped Mr. Pinkwiddy, to inform Achilles Hornblower that he desired the services of a competent sign painter at once. He wished to have painted in red, on the yellow doors of his new car, this inscription:

"HORATIO PINKWIDDY.
"Ad Unguem Factus Homo."

"Dat's gwine look moughty fine," commented Achilles. "But whut fo'? Evahbody gwine know dis am yo' cah befo' dis time to-morrah."

"Man," replied Horatio with withering scorn, "what you don't know concerning the small elegancies of life would make a gentleman tired to think about. Everybody who is who in London and N'Yawk has his name on his car. They sometimes do it in Philadelphia and Chicago."

"But bouten dis heah 'ad ungum facks home'—whut dat mean, Mistah Pinkwiddy?"

"Ignorant man," replied Mr. Pinkwiddy, "that is my family motto."

Leaving the Elite Garage, Mr. Pinkwiddy had the nerve to go to the Hirsute Parlors

and sit through a shave, hoping that he might pick up a bit of gossip that would serve to his advantage. But the chief topic of conversation among the barber shop hangers-on and the loungers in the billiard institute had to do with the fourth race at Havana and the prospective drawing of the Honduras lottery. Mr. Pinkwiddy returned disdainfully to his hotel, conscious that he had given great impetus to the potential activities of the Anti-Do-It League.

On the following afternoon, Mr. Pinkwiddy was prepared to put his plans to the test. He had acquired, meanwhile, a long crash duster, pearl gauntleted gloves, huge motor goggles, and a fore-and-aft cap, on which Joseph's well-known coat had nothing in the way of rainbow splashes. Knowledge gained in his chauffeur days, back in New York—a period of existence about which Mr. Pinkwiddy was discreetly silent—was of service now, as he set the motor to purring and eased gracefully out into the limelight.

"Yo' sho' does look eleganter dan a high-roostin' pullet," cried Achilles with envy. "But a long ahm kin reach up an' pull dat pullet down an' pluck hes feddahs," he added under his breath.

Mr. Hornblower, it may be surmised, was not quite reconciled to the bargain that Mr. Pinkwiddy had thrust upon him.

After driving casually and slowly about the principal thoroughfares frequented by the elite of darktown, that he might treat the natives to an eyeful of his new splendor, Mr. Pinkwiddy drew up before the neat little cottage occupied by Mrs. Prunella Peachblow. As he stepped down to the sidewalk, the door was thrown open, closed with a slam, and Mr. David Ebony came along the path as if he had been shot from a catapult. David was looking very glum as he paused to take in the figure in motor regalia that confronted him.

"Huh!" he snorted. "Yo' got one ob dem Yallah Sixes, too? Well, lemme tole yo'. Dey's bad luck. Ain't had no luck sence I boughten one. Dat's de onluckiest cah whut is."

"Luck is as you make it," replied Horatio airily.

"Huh!" snorted David again. "Yo' talkin' 'bout whut is ain't. Whut dat sign agin' de side ob yo' cah?"

"That is my family motto," answered Mr. Pinkwiddy with dignity.

"Huh! Us got a fambly mottah, too, whut hang obah de pa'lah doah. It say: 'Whut am home wifout yo' mammy.' Whut yo' mottah say?"

"'A gentleman to his finger nail,'" translated Mr. Pinkwiddy proudly.

"Huh!" And Mr. Ebony hastened down the street, apparently unconcerned by the presence of a rival at Mrs. Peachblow's door, and without knowing that he had been gazing upon his own former "onluckiest" Yellow Peril Six.

Mr. Pinkwiddy crossed the porch softly and paused before knocking, listening to a song that came to him from within. Prunella was the singer, and, in a scratchy female baritone, she was doing vociferous justice to the following inspiring lines:

I went in de valley,
An' I didn't go to stay.
O Lawd, how long!
But ma soul done git happy,
An' I stay all day.
O Lawd, how long!
I weeps, I moans,
I's soon gwine be gone—
In some lonesome grabeyahd.
O Lawd, how long!

"Nice cheerful song," commented Mr. Pinkwiddy. "Makes me feel like a funeral."

Then he proceeded to knock loudly, though not boisterously, quite as a gentleman-to-his-finger-nail should. The beginning of a second spasm about the lonesome graveyard ceased abruptly, the door was opened—and:

"Lawd bress ma heaht an' soul, iffen 'tain't Mistah Pinkwiddy! Come right intah de house an' lemme espress ma meanin' welcoam."

Mrs. Peachblow's round, fat, black face registered an apotheosis of pleasure. And at the end of a hearty handshake, Mr. Pinkwiddy was hauled indoors, almost before he could doff his goggles and his plaid cap, which he had left on until the last moment, for the dazzlement of Prunella.

"Set down an' espress yo'se'f fo' de honah ob which I is got de pleasuah ob dis visit," she invited cordially.

"First off," lied Horatio genially, "for the great pleasure of seeing you, Mrs. Peachblow. Also, to invite you to ride in my new car, and to discuss that little matter of business that we broached the other evening."

"Is yo' got a new cah? Well, now; ain't dat nice."

"Yes—a Yellow Peril Six."

"'Deed, now, is yo'! Jest lak Dave Ebony's?"

"Exactly." Mr. Pinkwiddy smiled. "It's his car."

"His cah? How come?"

"Oh, I took it off the dealer's hands, when the Ebony boys couldn't pay for it."

For a moment, Mrs. Peachblow's face blew decidedly dark in comparison to the flush of the luscious fruit that her name suggested.

"Is dat de truf?" she asked evenly.

"So help me Gawd," affirmed Mr. Pinkwiddy.

Then the storm broke. Prunella voiced her sentiments:

"Dat onahry, ondeceitful, lyin', thiebin' flea f'om de back ob a niggah skunk!"

"Meaning Mr. Ebony?" inquired Mr. Pinkwiddy mildly.

"Dat's him whut I mean—dat low-down, no-'count, misreprahsentin' scale f'om a chicken lice!"

"Was he telling you something wrong?"

"He was axin' me somefin' pussonahl." Prunella cast her eyes down with modest reserve, and, had nature endowed her with the requisite coloring, surely would have blushed. This attitude, however, was but momentary. "He ax me to mahhy him," she blazed afresh. "Dat's whut he done, aftah losin' hes money, an' dat cah, which I lub so much, intah de bahg'in—dat weasel-face, dawg-ear, bandy-laig imitashum ob a man!"

"And what did you tell him, if I may be so bold as to venture to inquire?" asked Mr. Pinkwiddy gently.

"Whut I tole him? I—I—tole him dat—dat he war a leetle too suddenlak in hes pupposement. But I knows whut I's gwine tole him now. Yas, sah. I's gwine tole him dat ma riches, whut he am aimin' to git, am sho' lock up agin' bu'glahs lak him."

"It makes me happy, indeed, to hear you express yourself in that manner," sighed Mr. Pinkwiddy.

"Make yo' happy? How come?"

Mr. Pinkwiddy averted his gaze and did a neat piece of acting.

"Because," he stammered, "because—oh, just because."

"Yo' espress yo'se'f lak a mystifyin' woman, Mistah Pinkwiddy. Whut yo' mean—becawse?"

"Because I——" Mr. Pinkwiddy paused with telling effect. "You know, Mrs. Peachblow," he resumed softly, "what that great writer, thinker, philosopher, and public speaker, Mister Lord Byron said about love? He said:

> "The cold in clime are cold in blood,
> And love as scarce deserves the name;
> But mine is like the lava flood,
> That burns in Ætna's breast of flame."

"Is yo' espressin' dat bootiful pome at me, Mistah Pinkwiddy?" asked Prunella, eyes bulging and mouth agape.

"That—that's the way I feel about you, Mrs. Peachblow."

"Glohy be, an' I nevah suspeckshuned it!" cried Prunella gayly. "Dat mean yo' lub me, Mistah Pinkwiddy?"

"That's what it means," murmured Mr. Pinkwiddy mendaciously.

"Ah-h-h-h-h!" Mrs. Peachblow plumped her plump person down on the sofa beside her visitor, and began to snuggle up. "Dat lub b'tween us make it so's us kin talk mo' familyahlak. Ain't it de truf? An' yo' kin call me Prunella—uh-huh."

Mr. Pinkwiddy sighed.

"It would afford me unbounded joy if you would address me as Horatio," he whispered.

"Yo' does use de mostest elegantest langwidge—Horatio." Then, as a thoughtful and practical concomitant to love: "I reckon, wif ouah conj'int an' cumbine foah-chunes, us could be double extra swell."

"I could not allow my wife to contribute anything toward the upkeep of the household menu and menage," replied Mr. Pinkwiddy grandly. "I would not ask any lady to marry me, unless I had enough money for both."

"Yo' ain't axed me—yit," insinuated Prunella.

"That's commonplace," evaded Mr. Pinkwiddy gracefully. "There are some things that one understands and comprehends without asking or accepting. Love is one of them—Prunella, darling."

"Yo' spoke de truf," sighed Prunella contentedly. "But us was speakin' bouten money. I's got a pow'ful lot ob riches, sence ma ole man die an' leave me dat insuahance policy. Lemme see: Us hab two hond'ed dollahs in de savin's bank, an' de house heah cleah an' free, an' den come along dat fibe t'ousand dollahs in payments fo' death benefits, ob which I is de benefittah. An' I sho' hab a sabin' disposishum. Reckon yo' is got heaps mo' dan dat—huh?"

"Heaps more," admitted Mr. Pinkwiddy, to whom the possession of five hundred was

riches untold. "I ain't had time to count it up lately, but I am going to have my bankers balance my books when I can deprive myself of the time and opportunity."

"Yo' cac'late us would live heah?"

"Part of the time—in winter, where it's warm; up North, on the sea coast, in summer, where it's cool. Swell rich folks always have two houses—sometimes three or half a dozen. Maybe we might have a villa on the Riverara, too."

"Whar dat?"

"Old-fashioned town in Europe, where swell society people who can afford it attend what they call watering places. Those European peoples need our good money, and the society peoples think they are getting more scenery than Saratoga and Florida and California and the Rocky Mountains and Niagara Falls and the Gulf of Mexico has got to offer, so everybody quits satisfied and content."

Duly impressed by this, Prunella sat silent, in ponderous pondering.

"But since you were speaking of money—Prunella sweetness," hastened Mr. Pinkwiddy, "I've been thinking of that which was the subject of our discourse one evening recently. Fame, as I said then, may not bring money, but money can bring fame. Now—Prunella, love—you need the development that your great riches call for and exact in the community of which you are endowed by birth and position and circumstance to be a leader. We agreed on that the other night."

"Dat's de truf," agreed Prunella, gazing with the awe of love upon her newly acquired Lothario.

"Then," resumed Horatio with the warmth of forensic fervor, "it is my pleasure and delight to have found the exact sphere in which you shall shine amidst the great and glorious of the land in which you dwell."

"How much dat gwine cost?" inquired Prunella cannily.

"Cost? Can you think of cost, when fame and the service of humankind are awaiting your magic touch? Listen: I have planned for you the organization of the Anti-Do-It League, which is destined to make you as famous as—as William H. Anderson or John D. Rockefeller or William Jennings Bryan."

"How come?" was Prunella's intelligent inquiry.

"You have heard of the Anti-Saloon League," continued Horatio, "which has put prohibition on the face of the map. But there remain other things to conquer than the Demon Rum. For instance: Tobacco, coffee, tea, candy, perfumes, jewelry, ice cream, soda water, cosmetics—all of those things which take money to buy and are of no practical service to the user, if not being an actual detriment to the state and condition of his or her health. We will stop the manufacture and sale of those things through the medium of the Anti-Do-It League, of which you will be the grand organizer and founder. You will start it right here, among the members of our ancient and noble race."

"Won't dat be elegant, now," beamed Prunella. "How I gwine git peoples to j'ine?"

"The Bible—the Holy Bible. You have only to turn to that great book of all knowledge, to prove the crying need of the Anti-Do-It League—to convince people of the error of their ways. Here; let me read to you."

With a single agile bound, Mr. Pinkwiddy was across the room, beside the bandy-legged, marble-topped table that supported, in ostentatious dignity, a velvet-bound copy of the Holy Bible. He opened the book casually and peered eruditely into its depths.

"Listen to what I find, the very first thing." Reading surreptitiously from the notes he had taken at the public library, Mr. Pinkwiddy proceeded: "This is what it says: 'Be not among wine bibbers, among riotous eaters of flesh. For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags.' That comes, Prunella honey, from the Book of Proverbs, the twenty-third chapter and the twentieth and twenty first verses. And here's what it says in the second verse of that wise preachment: 'And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite.' Then, in the twenty-fifth chapter of those holy words, it says, to wit: 'Hast thou found honey? Eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith and vomit it.' And Peter, in the second holy book he wrote, says: 'Add to knowledge temperance.' Then there's that famous old book of Deuteronomy, which express itself on the subject thus: 'This, our son, is stubborn and rebellious; he is a glutton.' There, now, Prunella, my lovely molasses drop, ain't that enough argument in favor of the Anti-Do-It League? Ain't it, now?"

"Dat sho' do say a lot," she admitted dazedly.

"Now, then," resumed Horatio enthusiastically, "it will be easy for you to interest your church——"

"Ain't got no chu'ch," interrupted Prunella.

"What! No church?"

"No, sah. I's got whut dey calls de New Highah Thought—ebah sence I heah a white lady lectuah bouten de subjec' up to de Oprah House. I was boahned a Mefodis,' but I done cut loose. Now, all de chu'ches is aftah me—on 'countin' ma riches. But I ain't see whur dey's any diffumrence 'twixt de Mefodis', de Baptis', or de Presbutehiums—leastways, in regahd to dey's all wantin' money am consahned."

"And they are all after yo' to join?"

"Preachas an' niggah eldahs an' lady deacums come runnin' aftah me lak a swahm ob bees roun' a honey jug—'countin' ma riches."

"Why, Prunie, dear, that's all the better," cried Horatio, with spontaneous sincerity. "You see, we can use all those churches to back the Anti-Do-It League."

"Dat's de truf, now," agreed Prunella, manifesting the first glimmer of real animation.

"And now," purred Mr. Pinkwiddy, "if you will deign to honor me with your company, we'll take a spin in my new Yellow Peril Six."

"Dat would be mos' splendelegant," and Prunella grinned ecstatically.

After Prunella had had that swell inscription on the doors translated for her benefit, Mr. Pinkwiddy cautiously cut through the back streets and hit the rural district—to minimize the danger of being observed by Miss Jacqueline Rose or any of her tattle-tale friends. And during that bucolic drive, he impressed Prunella with all the social advantages that would accrue to her through the Anti-Do-It League. He told her explicitly that she should not mention his name in connection with the altruistic emprise. Oh, no!

"Because," he said softly, "I want my ownest Prunella to have all the credit herself. And I'm going to write an article for the *Colored Courier*, this very afternoon, and tell the world and our great race all about your noble plans to save them from the evils of intemperance and ruin and disaster."

"Won't dat be nice, now—jest crowdin' fame ontah me, in addishium to all ma riches. Yo' sho' is de pleasinest man."

After which Mr. Pinkwiddy permitted himself to be kissed in a promised brief au revoir, and turned the nose of his Yellow Peril Six toward another fair field of conquest. He aimed to draw up before the small office of the Amalgamated Negro Merchants' Protective Association just a few minutes before Miss Jacqueline Rose, its executive secretary, should compete her day of leisurely labor. Mr. Pinkwiddy was certain of a cordial welcome, for the association was a child of his own brain. Also, he had recommended Miss Rose for executive secretary.

Sweet Jacqueline had occupied herself by circulating among the merchants reports on worthless creditors, and chewing gum, munching chocolates, sipping sodas, reading the spicy magazines, keeping her cheeks pinked and her nose powdered, and flirting alternatively with Goliath Ebony and Mr. Pinkwiddy. She was one of those tall, willowy gals, with languid voice, liquid eyes, and limpid brain, whose general make-up was suggestive of a slightly animated Christmas tree, and whose complexion might be indicated by a cup of well-creamed chocolate, in which a pink rose petal was permitted to float.

"Well, Mistah Pinkwiddy," she drawled, in her most cultivated manner; "I sho' is glad to beholden yo'. Got somefin' de mattah wif yo' eyes?"

"These are my new motor goggles," retorted Mr. P. with offended dignity, snatching them off.

Jacqueline laughed easily.

"Dat war jest ma leetle joke," she explained. "Dey sho' look becomin', aside dat colahful cap an' de yellah obahcoat. Is yo' hiah a cah or somefin'?"

"I have purchased a car—a Yellow Peril Six," explained Mr. Pinkwiddy stiffly.

"'Deed, now? One lak G'liath Ebony own?"

"*The* one that Goliath Ebony *used* to own. It happens to be the same car."

Jacqueline perked up suddenly and manifested signs of vulgar interest. "How come?" she inquired, in the very words of her unsuspected rival.

And as he had explained to Prunella, so Mr. Pinkwiddy elucidated the matter to Jacqueline. Whereupon, Jacqueline made comment:

"Dat 'counts fo' dat sneakin' niggah sidesteppin' slantwise yistidday bouten dat motah ride, aftah he make engagements wif me to ax me is I gwine considah his propahsishum to agree upon us havin' ouah 'trothal blighted."

"Meaning he has asked you to marry him?" inquired Mr. Pinkwiddy.

"N-not prezackly, in jest so much wohds, but he make his meanin' cleah as to which he mought look fo' me to espect. But I ain't give him no ansah. No, sah. Dey ain't no foah-flush niggah gwine rattle a few dimes in his pocket an' make me dreahm a millyum dollahs. I ain't dat kind ob gal. Nuthah, dey ain't no niggah gwine make speed wif me lak a motah cah, jest 'causin' his clo'es smells ob gasumlene."

"You have the right idea, Miss Rose," complimented Horatio. "With your grace and beauty and social position, not to mention your important standing in the business world, it, indeed, behooves you to be cautious of the wiles and blandishments of designing men."

"Men's kain't fool me wif designmunts," sniffed Miss Rose, slapping the ample tip of her nose with a large powder puff. "I looks at how dey acks, 'stid ob what dey shoots off f'om deys moufs. An' dat G'liath Ebony done 'peah shifty to me, come de past week or mo'. But yo' ain't call to talk bouten niggah trash, Mistah Pinkwiddy. I bet yo' had a mind to ax me somefin' nice."

Jacqueline's inflection was delicately interrogative, and she treated her visitor to one of her most alluringly coquettish smiles.

"Depends on what it is your pleasure and convenience to consider nice," replied Horatio gracefully. "The main purpose and intent for which I give myself the unbounded pleasure of this brief visit, is to invite you to extend the courtesy of your charming company to me for the enjoyment of a drive about the country in my new Yellow Peril Six."

"How sweet yo' do talk—jest lak de drip ob 'lasses on a hot, brown waffle," purred Jacqueline sentimentally. "An' yo' kin set de honah ob yo' pleasuah at ease, Mistah Pinkwiddy, fo' I accepts yo' kind offah, an' de distinguishment am all mine."

With which polite pronouncement, Miss Rose proceeded to adjust her hat and veil before a small mirror. While so engaged, her joyous spirit inspired expression in song:

"Oh, Zaccheus war a rightchus man;
He war not vehy high.
Oh, Zaccheus climb de sicamoah tree,
To see de Lawd pass by.

You' kin see de moat in yo' bruddah's eye;
But yo' kain't find any in yo' own.
So, go right home an' sweep out yo' house,
An' let us childun alone."

The unconscious philosophy of Jacqueline's song lapsed, without intermission, into a meaningless medley of jazz, after which she turned to face her fancied admirer.

"I's ready," she beamed.

"I'm sorry," sighed Mr. Pinkwiddy, with telling histrionic effect.

"Sohhy? Why fo'?" Jacqueline was not sure whether she should be offended.

"Because those songs which you sing in that tender tone make a deep impression on my heart and soul. Perhaps you have knowledge, Miss Rose, of the words of that well-known play writer, who died a little while back. I have reference to Mr. Shakespeare, whose dramas are still presented by stock companies sometimes. He said: 'If music be the food of love, play on; give me a surfeit of it.' And that's how I feel when you sing, Miss Rose. I want to be all fed up with it. Which reminds me of another expression of true sentiment, which was also written by Mr. Shakespeare: 'Love is like a child, that longs for everything.' And—and that's how I feel, too."

"Is yo' axin' me to mahhy yo' in potery?" she demanded suddenly.

The intensely practical interpretation of his honeyed words gave Mr. Pinkwiddy somewhat of a shock, but he was compelled to be game.

"If it would favor your inclinations in the matter to regard my quotations from the well-known play writer in such light," replied Mr. Pinkwiddy evasively. "But you gals always say, 'This is so sudden,' " he added lightly. "I suppose you will register according to the accepted traditions of your fair sex, and want to think it over for a few days?"

"No, sah," flashed Jacqueline with startling promptitude. "I knows men ob bizness lak yo' is, an' dey likes quick ackshum. Deyfoah, I fixes de mahhiage day right now fo' de Fo'th ob July."

"That will be fine—fine," agreed Mr. Pinkwiddy. "Meanwhile, let's take that auto ride and get some air."

For him, the forthcoming Fourth of July indicated a hot time, in more ways than one.

"Fu'st off," said Jacqueline, "I is got to stop at de drug stoah an' git some mo' brunette face powdah, so's I don't git ma complexshum ruffed by de wind."

"My car has a fine windshield and we're not going to ride fast, because I have certain words of importance which I wish to express to you," Mr. Pinkwiddy ventured by way of protest. He had a wholesome fear of tattle-tales.

"But s'posin' de wind come f'om de side, or dey kicks up a stohm?" suggested Miss Rose. "Whut I do den, wifout no brunette face powdah?"

"You could lay your tender little face snug against the lovin' shoulder of my new motor topcoat."

"Dat would perteck on'y one side ob ma face," argued Jacqueline wisely. "Obah de top—to de drug stoah," she retorted joyously.

"My zero hour!" groaned Horatio inwardly. Then, aloud: "Must you go there, my precious pearl?"

"Is yo' ashame ob me, Mistah Pinkwiddy?" she flashed truculently.

"Am I ashamed of the sunshine? Am I ashamed of my life's greatest treasure—my Jacqueline? No! Am I ashamed of my wealth and position? Twice no! Go 'long, now, my bunch of ruby sweetness."

Jacqueline went, paused at the curb and gaped in wonderment. And again Mr. Pinkwiddy had to explain how much of a gentleman he was to his finger nail, in elucidation of that *soi disant* family motto that plastered the sides of his Yellow Peril Six.

At the drug store, things were quite as his fears had anticipated. But if haughty mein and proud dignity might armor one from barbs of gossip, Mr. Pinkwiddy was abundantly protected. He was as a man of ice, although Jacqueline, in her superior way, bowed and smiled from right to left as she glided majestically into the shop.

While he was making pretense of examining his engine, Horatio had an inspiring thought. He hurried into the store, and bought a box of the best chocolates at another counter.

"For my little sugar plum," he said, throwing the box into her lap, as they slipped out into the sweet-smelling roads, where cabbage is grown and not cooked in confinement. Any one familiar with any well-established black belt will know the difference.

Jacqueline selected a marshmallow—the largest piece in the box—clipped it in twain with her mother-of-pearl teeth, munched reflectively and bathed Mr. Pinkwiddy with an effulgent glance from those liquid eyes of hers.

"Yo' know how dis heah candy 'mind me of yo'?" she asked.

"If it is for the same reason that it reminds me of you, it is because it is so sweet," he smiled gallantly.

"Dat ain't de chiefest reesum I was a-mind to espress," she simpered. "It's 'cawse it's so rich an' elegant."

Which broad compliment found no ready response from its object. He just laughed and fell to thinking.

"You won't be eating candy very much longer," he remarked presently. "Haven't you heard of the Don't-Do-It League?"

"Whut dat?"

"You know about the Anti-Saloon League, of course?"

"Ob co'se. Eberybody know bouten dem little peoples whut writ de 'lebenth c'mandment, which say drink whut I drink an' lak it, or drink nothin' 'tall."

"It's going to be the same about candy," sighed Mr. Pinkwiddy. "The Anti-Do-It League has got candy on its list, as well as brunette face powder, lip sticks, cheek paint, soda water, jewelry, tea, coffee, tobacco, silks, laces, perfumes——"

"Who startin' dat Ain't-Do-It League?"

"I understand that some of our prominent society people, backed by the influence of the churches, are launching the movement. It's going through, too, I have every reason to fear. And then what's going to become of our progressive merchants? Why, even the drug store will be able to sell nothing but medicines and hospital supplies. Most of the enterprising members of our Amalgamated Negro Merchants' Association will be put out of business. And wherein will be the joy of life? Where, I ask you, my emerald gem—where?"

"'Tain't gwine be," snorted Jacqueline. "I's gwine tole de merchants bouten dat plot, an' hab de bud nipped right in de root."

"That's a fine idea," beamed Mr. Pinkwiddy. He could well afford to beam. Things were coming his way. "But," he added, "it is going to take some money to fight this movement. I would suggest that

you, as executive secretary, approach the merchants in the matter, and have them contribute—we'll say, to begin, about five dollars each toward a fund to set up an opposing propaganda. Of course, in view of my official position I cannot appear openly in this fight, because members of our organization are arrayed on opposite sides. But my sympathies are with the merchants and the people who love liberty and freedom; and if you will arrange this fund and turn it over to me, I will see that it is used to the greatest advantage."

"I's sho' gwine do dat," expressed Jacqueline firmly. "Gwine try to stop off candy an sody watah an' brunette face powdah, is dey? Huh! De vehy idéa!"

Mr. Pinkwiddy proceeded to give her explicit instructions as to how she should proceed with the merchants. After which he drove her home, condescendingly brushed her rose-rouged lips in a farewell kiss, put his Yellow Peril Six in the garage and hastened back to his hotel, where he had important work before him. He deferred intimate contact with fried chicken and sweet potatoes and hastened to his room, where, for the next hour, he busied himself with a pencil and numerous sheets of paper.

The result was a profound article, proclaiming the organization of the Anti-Do-It League by the widely known and wealthy widow, Mrs. Prunella Peachblow. He told how the church folk were behind the movement, which would abolish the consumption of everything non-essential to the actual necessities of life, and, therefore, would permit of greater saving and assure greater health and prosperity to those whom the Anti-Do-It League was designed to benefit. Mr. Pinkwiddy sealed the article in an envelope and took it to the editor of the *Colored Courier*.

"I don't know what is in this here envelop," he explained mendaciously; "but a friend of mine just asked me to leave it with you, with the request that it be published in the morning issue of your great newspaper."

On the following day, there was some commotion. The editor, running true to the form that was expected of him, printed Mr. Pinkwiddy's exposition of the Anti-Do-It League in full. The amalgamated merchants held a meeting in the morning, and Jacqueline did her duty. She collected one hundred and fifty dollars on the spot.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Prunella Peachblow was having an interesting morning. First to call was the Baptist minister. Then came the Methodist dominie, closely followed by the Presbyterian pastor. They met in her little parlor, and united in praise of the noble move that she had inaugurated. But could she accomplish the great work? Would she not accept the aid of the churches? Of course she would. Mr. Pinkwiddy had told her that they would all fall into line, and here they were, just as he had predicted. But how had she the courage to launch such a far-reaching campaign without assistance?

"'Deed, now," she laughed, "don't yo' preachah-mans comsidah dat I ain't had espert advisements bouten how to do it fo' de Anti-Do-Its. I done hab de privumlege ob de bestest info'mashum f'om de hands ob a gemman whut stand de highest in ouah midst."

Later that day, Mr. Pinkwiddy called on Miss Rose. It was then that she confidently gave into his keeping the one hundred and fifty dollars. And to merit this small asset, he sat down forthwith and wrote a scathing article for the *Colored Courier,* expressing the rightful rage of the merchants at the scurrilous Anti-Do-It movement, which was aimed to ruin their business and to deprive a free-born people of liberty and the pursuit of happiness, et cetera, et cetera. He left this screed with Miss Rose, to be delivered to the editor.

Somewhat later, he Yellow-Peril-Sixed around to the home fo Mrs. Peachblow, to hear her glowing report. He tried to think how, from her end of the enterprise, he might extract something to augment that one hundred and fifty; it did not seem advisable to broach the subject yet.

After leaving her house, he went away uptown, to a white folks' printer who did not know him, and spent five dollars to have struck off a couple of hundred cards, bearing this inscription:

JOIN
The Anti-Do-It League.
SUPPRESS

The evils of candy, ice cream, soda water, tobacco, perfumes, cosmetics, and all non-essentials.

SAVE
Your money and your health!

To add fuel to the spreading flames, Mr.

Pinkwiddy hired a boy for fifty cents and had him leave these cards with the merchants, with the request that they distribute them among their patrons.

Subsequently, he added more fuel to the flames by refusing to return to the Ebony brothers that Yellow Peril Six, when they appealed to him with tears in their eyes and fifty good dollars—his first payment on the car—in their hands.

Meanwhile, the fires of dissension waxed from hot to hotter, and from that to hottest. Sympathetic lines of demarcation were drawn sharply between the Anti-Do-Its and the anti-Anti-Do-Its. On Sunday, the pastors of the leading churches bellowed loudly from their pulpits, in support of the high principles of the league. The merchants, singly and en masse, shrieked their protests. The *Colored Courier* bravely withstood religious pressure for support and aligned itself editorially on the side of the merchants, thereby increasing its income from advertising.

Oh, a warm time was had by all those present! Deacon Dew, of the Methodist church, became engaged in a common street brawl with Sam Shine, the bootblack, and was reported to have chewed off a perfectly good lobe that Nature had made a part of Samuel's left ear. On the same eventful evening, Tessie Files, the up-to-date manicurist, snatched the wig from the sedate pate of Sister Pray, chairlady of the Ladies' Aid Society. It came about when Sis Pray said that those who had good teeth ought to be biting their nails and giving their money to their wives, instead of paying it to a painted hussy to have them cut.

There was just one thing that Mr. Pinkwiddy did not know. That was that everybody else in town knew that Mr. Pinkwiddy, in some way, was involved in the Anti-Do-It business. Some said he was for, some insisted he was against the league. And when the insistence became too great in opposite directions, a fight usually followed.

In the interim, the brothers Ebony were not idle. They had lost a fine Yellow Peril Six, and it appeared to them, after comparing notes, that they were about to suffer likewise in respect to the sweetest, dearest pair of gals in town. They wanted to get hunk on somebody. David was thinking seriously about the matter one morning, while he honed his battery of razors in the Hirsute parlor. It happened that this was the morning of Friday, the thirteenth.

"Mighty unlucky day," cogitated Mr. Pinkwiddy.

He debated as to whether he should fade gently away, before something happened. He flipped a coin. The toss bade him stay.

"Oh, well," he sighed resignedly; "that means a little more money for papa—a little more money. I'll sure slice that collection to-night."

The collection to which the artful schemer cast covetous eyes was that to be taken from the members of the Great International Association for the Protection of Freeborn Negro Americans, who were to meet that very evening—the evening of Friday, the thirteenth. Also, as was the custom once a month, the Ladies' Auxiliary of the G. I. A. P. F. N. A. was to assemble conjointly with the brethren of the uplift on this evening. Also, the grand traveling president of the G. I. A. P. F. N. A., Mr. Pinkwiddy, was expected to preside. And also, in view of the ruckus being kicked up by the Anti-Do-It League, Mr. Pinkwiddy was just a little dubious about appearing before a large and enthusiastic audience—especially on the commonly unlucky evening of Friday, the thirteenth.

However, the promised slice from that potential collection was more than Mr. Pinkwiddy could bring himself to ignore. "But after that meeting," he told himself, "I guess the atmosphere which I occupy in this here place will be less disturbed with me out of it."

Mr. Pinkwiddy stepped nimbly into his Yellow Peril Six, sped to the meeting place of the Great International, et cetera, and parked his car at the curb opposite the speakers' entrance. As he glided elegantly into the president's chair on the rostrum, a sea of mixed faces—mixed from the color of pale tea to black coffee—was upturned to greet him. There was a little buzz, like that of a bee settling on a honeysuckle vine, as he entered; then a deep, dark silence. Matters went well until he called for unfinished business. Whereupon Lawyer Jonathan Brief, who should have known better, sprang to his feet.

"De mostest onfinished bizness in dis heah town," he cried, "is de fumdoodle bizness which hab to do wif de organizashum an' de management ob dat which is call de Anti-Do-It League. I, fo' one——"

"Sit down, Brother Brief," shouted Mr. Pinkwiddy, banging his gavel. "You're out of order."

The grand traveling president cast anxious eyes over the assemblage. In that glance, he saw, among others, Miss Jacqueline Rose, Mrs. Prunella Peachblow, and the brothers Ebony, the presence of whom did not serve to ease his peace of mind.

"I ain't gwine set down," retorted Lawyer Brief. "I is heah to make moshum dat de onfinished bizness be declahed de investigashum ob de pupposes an' activities ob de Anti-Do-It League, an'——"

"The motion is out of order," shrieked Mr. Pinkwiddy, amidst the growing confusion.

David Ebony leaped from his chair.

"Den I seccunts de moshum," he yelled. "I wants to know by whut process ob de law an' oadah a officah ob dis organizashum kin git a Yallah Pehil Six cah as hissen own fo' de small price ob fifty dollahs."

"I wants to espress mase'f lakwise," bellowed brother Goliath, overturning his chair in his haste to arise. "Also an' too, I wishes to leahn whut kind ob man is it whut make engagemunts to mahhy two fair wimmens at once an' de same time."

"And I," stormed Editor Quibble, of the *Courier*, "demand to know who it was who penned two articles, one for and the other against the Anti-Do-It League, and each written in the same individual and identical hand."

"An' whar's de money, an' whar's ma spoliated love?" shrilled Jacqueline.

Through that cloud of upturned faces, Mr. Pinkwiddy saw Mrs. Peachblow arise. He felt wan and worn and weary; but at least he would squelch her intended utterance.

"Peace! Quiet! Be still!" he commanded, with the weak remnant of his voice, raising his hands to calm the torrent. "I had prepared a statement to read to you tonight, my brothers and sisters—a statement that will explain everything to your satisfaction. And since you are insistent, I shall read it to you now, rather than later, so that we may proceed with the orderly progress of the meeting of our great and glorious organization."

Mr. Pinkwiddy stalled by fumbling in the inside pocket of his coat. While so engaged, he saw Prunella gravitating down the middle aisle, toward the front door. There was need for haste and discretion.

"I believe," announced Mr. Pinkwiddy, "that I have left that statement in the pocket of my topcoat, back here in the coat room. Excuse me a moment."

Swiftly, silently, Mr. Pinkwiddy slipped through the door from the rear of the stage, into the coat room. But he did not stop there. Oh, no! In passing, he snatched up his plaid fore-and-aft cap from a chair, leaving his tan duster and gauntleted gloves where they lay, and hot-footed it for the side stairs, down which he plunged, three at a leap. At the bottom of those stairs was his faithful Yellow Peril Six—and Prunella!

Mr. Pinkwiddy did not know of the party awaiting him until he hit the sidewalk; not even then, until he plumped into the plump person of Prunella, and found two strong, chubby arms tightly entwined about his neck.

"I's been a-waitin' fo' yo', sweetness," she palpitated. "I jest knowed yo' wouldn't stay to argufy agin' ignumrent, ongrateful niggahs, lak dey is. An' I say to mase'f I's prepeah to cast aside dat wo'thless Anti-Do-It League, jest to go wif ma honey boy, to make him happy."

"That's right, that's right," spluttered Horatio, disentwining those clinging arms. "Just a minute," he added, thrusting her aside, as she attempted to climb into the car. "I've got to get this engine started first."

Mr. Pinkwiddy sprang into the driver's seat, manipulated the self-starting device, stepped on the gas and jumped into high gear, leaing Prunella's last words to linger in the roar of the motor.

It was the better part of wisdom not to stop at the hotel to pick up any of his personal effects. Anyway, his best was on his back. All he had there was an old suit of clothes, which he wore in his room while he was having his cream flannels cleaned and pressed; a dilapidated trunk, and a few odds and ends of haberdashery. Incidentally, he owed the hotel forty dollars.

"Best let sleeping dogs rest easy," he reasoned as he hit the highway, bound for a railway station ten miles distant.

A few hundred yards distant from this haven, Mr. Pinkwiddy stopped his Yellow Peril Six, leaped to the road and found a rock with jagged edges. With this, he proceeded to obliterate the proud name of Horatio Pinkwiddy from the doors of that ele-

gant car, entirely disregarding the high cost of paint.

"There, now," he said to the car. "You've done your bit, and the Ebony boys can have you back, free gratis for nothing. But I suspect you done me wrong—you and the gals. Love has got no place in business. No, sir!"

Fifteen minutes later, the calm and elegant Mr. Pinkwiddy was sitting in the waiting room of the station, waiting for the midnight train, and, meanwhile, taking account of stock. The Anti-Do-It deal, he figured, had profitted him just one hundred and thirty-four dollars and fifty cents net. He had got one hundred and fifty from the merchants, and had spent fifty for the Yellow Peril Six, five for Anti-Do-It cards and fifty cents to have them delivered. Then, he charged to his gain that unpaid hotel bill of forty dollars. He didn't bother to count the one dollar and fifty cents he had paid for chocolates for Jacqueline.

"Not so bad, not so bad," murmured Mr. Pinkwiddy. "But women are hell. Yes, sir. I'll have to put the Anti-Do-It on 'em in future."

From down the road came the whistle of the midnight local. In return, Mr. Pinkwiddy began to whistle—a snatch of joyous jazz.

SACCHARIN AND SUGAR

THE controversy over the relative merits of saccharin and sugar seems destined to endure as long as the human race demands sweetening in its food, or until some new and undreamed substitute for both shall have captured the public taste. The warning issued by the bureau of chemistry of the Department of Agriculture against the too-free use of saccharin is now combated by various authorities, including some of the best-known chemists of the country.

It was only forty years ago that saccharin was discovered by Professor Ira Remsen, of Johns Hopkins University. At first its cost of manufacture made it expensive for common purposes, but when the process was improved until it was much cheaper than sugar, its use in Europe as well as in America became widespread. Vigorous opposition was encountered by the manufacturers, in Germany especially, where the beet-sugar industry was being developed. There and in other countries arbitrary laws were enacted, which were generally admitted to be for the purpose of protecting established industries that yielded the governments huge revenues.

In recent years, however, and particularly since the acute sugar shortage occasioned by the war, the same European countries have not only tolerated the manufacture and sale of saccharin, but have encouraged its wider use. In America the fight has taken a different course. Following official regulations based upon the food and drug act of 1906, the controversy was brought to the attention of President Roosevelt, who appointed a referee board of scientific experts, with Professor Remsen as chairman. Professor Herter, of Columbia, and Professor Folin, of Harvard, in collaboration with a number of the ablest scientists of the country, were on this board. They investigated the question from all angles, including the influence of the chemical substitute for sugar on digestion, metabolism, nutrition, and general health. Their report was not unfavorable to saccharin.

Notwithstanding this report, Doctor Wiley, before it was made public, prepared another hostile regulation, which was adopted by the pure food board under the impression that it met the approval of the Remsen investigators. When the discrepancy between the referee board and the Wiley regulation was realized by the pure food board, the matter was again referred to Professor Remsen and his collaborators, who prepared a supplemental report, which again justified the claims of the manufacturers as to the harmlessness of saccharin.

A Chat With You

SOMETIMES our acquaintances ask us questions like this:

"Don't you ever get tired of reading stories?" "Why can't writers for the magazines turn out work like the great French writers, like De Maupassant and Flaubert, for instance?" "Don't the magazines put in a lot of stories just to fill up?" "Isn't it too bad that so much indifferent fiction is published?" "Isn't it true that stories are bought mostly on account of the authors' names?"

Here are five questions. Suppose we try to answer them in their order.

YES, we sometimes get tired of reading stories. So do tennis players get tired of tennis, and golf players get tired of golf, and bridge enthusiasts or poker players decide to give up cards forever. A man may grow stale doing anything.

We have noticed, however, that the tennis player flings his racket at the net, not after winning a set, but after batting a few wild ones out of bounds. The golfer decides either to give away his clubs or break them up, preferably the latter, after he has made the startling discovery that he can't play the game after all these years. Bridge players make up their minds to quit when their luck has vanished and their skill fails them. Followers of the old American game come to the conclusion that it is just a waste of time when they have held a full house and the other fellow drew three cards and came out with four aces. What's the use?

After all, the stories we get tired of reading are the bad stories, the well-written, dull stories, the stories that you can't conscientiously lay aside till the end because they continually hold forth some promise and never fulfill it.

As for the good stories, the stories we like and print, we will get tired reading them when the poker player gets tired of raking in jack pots. Ask him when that is. We don't know. If you confine your reading to the pages of this magazine you can have no idea how many dull stories are written. You never see them.

WHY don't our writers turn out stories like the great French and Russian masters of the short tale? Partly because they can't. Chiefly because they don't want to. No matter what the highbrows may say of their literary excellence, the average American like ourselves is apt to find something morbid and depressing about many of the gifted European writers. Lots of people praise them who never read them. It is the hall mark of a certain sort of culture to admire them. We may be wanting in some of the finer æsthetic qualifications, but we still retain sincerity and we don't pretend. If we were to pick a French writer to imitate we would say Dumas. The successful writers know this as well as we do. They know that they do things differently in France, and they wisely stick to the standards that have grown up in English and American literature. At bottom the taste of the average American, not highbrow, is sound.

THE query as to stories being put in to fill up resembles the remark sometimes made to newspaper men that it must be hard to get enough news to

fill up the pages. This remark never fails to intensely exasperate the newspaper man. He knows all too well how hard it is to find room for the news that simply must get in. No, we never need stories to fill up. The problem is to make space for the good stories we want to print. Some magazines may need filling. We can't understand it. With us it is a struggle to get it all in.

AND now for question number three in regard to the amount of indifferent fiction published. We don't know whether it is "too bad" or not. Some days when we have been caught in a subway jam we have thought it was too bad there were so many people in the world. The only reason so many stories are written and published is that there is such a big demand. The more stories written, however, the more chance for good ones.

AS regards buying stories on account of the name or reputation of an author, there is nothing in it so far as we are concerned. We want the name of the man who can write a good story, but we don't want it unless it is signed to his best work. We are sorry to say that this is not the case everywhere. More than one attempt has been made to build up a magazine on names, without consideration of the quality of the stuff. They get by for a time. Sometimes clever illustrations, fine appearance, and famous names will fool the public into buying empty, machine-made goods; but it can never last. Frequently you ask us why the name of this author or that author does not appear in every number. You have the answer. We are not buying stories for their names. The authors who make THE POPULAR only come before you when they are at their best.

THERE is such a thing as buying a magazine for appearance and not for taste. There are many commodities put out in which the wrapper or container, designed to catch the public eye, costs a good deal more than the thing itself. We are not in that line of business. When you buy this magazine you are getting the most for the money in stories and the pleasure that they bring. You are not paying for illustrations, you are not asked to follow a story through devious mazes of advertising matter somewhere in the back of the book. You are getting names, the names of the present best authors and the future as well—but you are getting good stories every time.

THE next number proves it. Howard Fielding's complete novel, "The Unknown Quantity;" the short stories by Cullen, Raymond Brown, Hamish McLaurin, Rothvin Wallace, Knibbs, Roy Norton, and Roy Hinds; the serials by Bertrand Sinclair and Edgar Wallace—all these make up the greatest collection of current American fiction possible to find anywhere. If you want to be sure of getting your copy, order it now.

le Deposits $500 A Month!"

"SEE that man at the Receiving Teller's window? That's Billy King, Manager for Browning Company. Every month he comes in and deposits $500. I've been watching Billy for a long time—take almost as much interest in him as I do in my own boy.

'A few years ago he started at Brown-'s at $15 a week. Married, had one d, couldn't save a cent. One day he e in here desperate—wanted to bor- a hundred dollars—wife was sick.

aid, 'Billy, I'm going to give you something nore than a loan—some good advice— ou'll follow it I'll let you have the hun-). You don't want to work for $15 a your life, do you?' Of course he didn't. I said, 'there's a way to climb out of to something better. Take up a course International Correspondence Schools e work you want to advance in, and put ie of your evenings getting special training. 'chools will do wonders for you—I know, got several I. C. S. boys right here in the

nat very night Billy wrote to Scranton and days later he had started studying at home. in a few months he had doubled his ! Next thing I knew he was put in charge s department, and two months ago they e him Manager. And he's making real ey. Owns his own home, has quite a little erty beside, and he's a regular at that win- every month. It just shows what a man do in a little spare time."

Employers are begging for men with ambition, men who really want to get ahead in the world and are willing to prove it by training themselves in spare time to do some one thing **well.**

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Is there any reason why *you* should let others climb over you when you have the same chance they have? Surely the least you can do is to find out just what there is in this proposition for *you*. Here is all we ask: Without cost, without obligating yourself in any way, simply mark and mail this coupon.

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